

**MARY STAR OF THE SEA:
THE INTERPLAY OF IMMIGRATION AND RELIGION IN ITALIAN CATHOLIC
DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES IN THE PORT OF LOS ANGELES**

**A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the
Claremont School of Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
Mary Clark Moschella**

May 2001

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Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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ABSTRACT

MARY STAR OF THE SEA: THE INTERPLAY OF IMMIGRATION AND RELIGION IN ITALIAN CATHOLIC DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES IN THE PORT OF LOS ANGELES

by

Mary Clark Moschella

This dissertation explores the function and meaning of Catholic devotional practices for Italian immigrants, their children, and grandchildren in San Pedro, California. Grounded in pastoral theology, this interdisciplinary study follows Elaine Graham's call to engage in the "critical phenomenology of pastoral practice." The devotions function as a form of pastoral care for immigrants, helping them address experiences of economic crisis, hunger, survival, loss of loved ones, or fear of loss associated with the fishing industry in San Pedro as well as with experiences of displacement from natal lands. Bringing together psychological, historical, social, and pastoral analyses, the author demonstrates how the devotional practices have spiritually validated and memorialized these experiences.

The three main topics described are the visual aspects of the devotions, the impact of the fishing industry on devotional practices, and the religious meaning of food in this setting. Issues of class, gender, and the construction of ethnic identity are also addressed. Ethnographic interviews conducted with members of three Italian immigrant generations provide the primary data, supplemented by participant observation and the examination of available historical documents. Theoretical tools include Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "*habitus*," employed to identify the shared meanings, habits and images that characterize

the devotional practices and function, in turn, to preserve religious structures. D. W. Winnicott's notion of "transitional space" is used to interpret psychological and spiritual dimensions of the devotions. Values arising out of the devotional practices are identified and interpreted as examples of the embodied "practical wisdom" of the local faith community. Implications for the wider field of pastoral theology and care are identified.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is my pleasure to acknowledge the many individuals and institutions that helped make this dissertation possible. Claremont School of Theology (CST), with its ties to the Claremont Graduate University, proved to be a superb learning environment for me throughout my work on this study. Dr. Kathleen J. Greider has been my primary advisor and mentor. Through her teaching and her person she has modeled many things. Perhaps foremost among them is the ability to direct care-full attention to a situation, a person, a piece of written work. While the value of accuracy, precision, or exact understanding is certainly enshrined in many educational settings, rarely is this value offered as a gift to students, modeled as a form of embodied care, in the gracious manner that Kathleen employs. I have learned from her that precision is in fact a critical ingredient in pastoral care and counseling as well as in good scholarship. Dr. William Clements, co-chair of the CST Pastoral Care and Counseling Program, has inspired in me confidence, freedom of thought, and the challenge of finding my own voice. Early on, he encouraged my interest in interdisciplinary study, claiming that the edges of any discipline, the places where one field meets others, are always the most intellectually exciting sites. I have relied steadily on Bill's gentle guidance, his focus on larger questions, his intelligent spirit and unbridled mind.

My interest in interdisciplinary study was met by many at Claremont with encouragement and challenge. Dr. Ann Taves in the History of Christianity Department offered both of these in abundance. While I greatly feared her exacting intellect and rapid

analytic powers, I was often surprised to find in Ann's classroom the permission to explore, to wonder, to play with ideas that were not yet fully formed. Dr. Scott Cormode's enthusiasm for my first directed study in "ethnicity and religion in America" was a source of inspiration in what I now recognize to be the early stages of my thinking toward this dissertation. Dr. Christa McNerney, my clinical supervisor at the Christian Counseling Service in Redlands, California, shared her thoughtful reflections on pastoral theology from a Catholic perspective. Dr. Hal Barron, Professor of American Social History at Harvey Mudd College and the Claremont Graduate University, helped me develop the ability to entertain history and to be entertained and moved by it. Hal was also the one who suggested that I consider San Pedro as a place to conduct my research.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the people of San Pedro, and especially those who agreed to interviews. Their generosity of spirit made the research and the writing incredibly pleasurable for me. Particularly, I want to thank Monsignor Patrick Gallagher and the people of Mary Star of the Sea parish who shared so much of themselves with me. Anne Hansford and Al Bitonio of the San Pedro Bay Historical Society welcomed me often, and graciously assisted my research. The Reverend Art Bartlett also shared his historical expertise. The Seaman's Church Institute provided free office space. I also thank Dr. Louisa Del Guidice of the Italian Oral History Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles for sharing source material and encouraging me in this work.

I am grateful to Dr. James Lewis and the Board of Directors of The Louisville Institute for providing a generous Dissertation Fellowship. This year-long support enabled me to work full time at the project, keeping up the momentum and the joy of working.

Dr. Carol Ellis and the members of the dissertation-writer's support group at the Writing Center at Claremont Graduate University helped me articulate ideas and struggles, set deadlines, and keep writing. The group added camaraderie, humor, and grace to a stressful process. Carol and her associates at the Writing Center also read the early drafts and helped me snatch clarity from the chaos of the *ex nihilo* pages.

Many friends accompanied me through all the phases of this work. While I was conducting the research, my longtime friend Lee Lassetter offered companionship and a place to stay in Long Beach. Many friends at Claremont were also a wonderful source of joy and hope throughout the project. Among the many whom I would like to name are Emily Click, Director of Field Education, Betty Clements, Reference Librarian, and Elaine Walker, Circulation Librarian and Thesis Secretary. Among my colleagues in the CST Pastoral Care and Counseling Program, I am pleased to thank Janet Schaller, Michael Koppel, Kristen Leslie, and Earl and Belinda Freeman. Along with her caring friendship, Janet Schaller also offered a critical suggestion at a time when I was at a theoretical loss—that I take a look the work of Elaine Graham.

I also want to acknowledge President Douglass Lewis and Dean Bruce Birch of Wesley Theological Seminary. In their practical wisdom, they encouraged me to delay the start of my teaching at Wesley in order to complete the bulk of my work on the

dissertation first. The gift of a deadline should never be underestimated. I am grateful, too, to my new colleagues and students at Wesley, who have cheered me on in the final phases of the work.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my family. My parents, Sabino and Carmela Moschella, cannot be held accountable for my interpretations, but they do deserve credit for providing much of the raw material from which the interests and instincts driving this work sprang. They have also offered endless love and support throughout my own family's migrant saga—to California and back.

I am grateful to my husband and friend, Douglas Clark, who offered crucial technical expertise in the production of these pages. More importantly, Doug has supported my desire to study, encouraged me in weak moments, and in many practical ways, made my work possible. He kept the household running smoothly or bumpily during my most absorbed phases, and cared for our children and me with uncommon devotion. During my graduate education, our children, Ethan and Abbey Clark-Moschella, often expressed the wish that they could have a "regular mother." They have grown and thrived nonetheless with an irregular one. For this grace and mercy, I am profoundly grateful.

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CHAPTER I

Ties that Bind

Introduction

“Mother of Christ, Star of the Sea, pray for the wanderer, pray for me.” These lyrics to an old immigrant hymn were “painstakingly glued” onto the 1989 Parish Centennial Banner of Mary Star of the Sea Church in San Pedro, California.¹ The church’s sanctuary, home to one of the largest Catholic parishes in the Diocese of Los Angeles, also attests to the devotions of the many wanderers from Europe, Asia, and Central America who have immigrated to San Pedro, the Port of Los Angeles. In the center of the chancel is a large white marble statue of Mary, treading on a wave and holding a purse seiner—a tuna boat (Figure 1 and Figure 2). This statue bespeaks the centrality of the fishing industry to this church and to the history of San Pedro. The two largest stained glass windows, flanking Mary on either side of the sanctuary, suggest the prominent twin prayers of local fishermen and their families: prayers for an abundant catch, and prayers for safety at sea. The window on the left depicts Jesus’ disciples hauling in their nets overflowing with fish (Figure 3); the one on the right shows Jesus standing upright in a boat, stilling the Galilean storm (Figure 4). Though the once booming fishing and canning industries in San Pedro have declined precipitously in recent years, devotions to Mary and various patron saints remain robust in this congregation. This is still an immigrant church, conscious of its place on the shore and of

¹ Mel Bobich and Samuel J. Palmer, Jr., eds., *Mary Star of the Sea Parish Centennial, 1889-1989* (San Pedro, Calif.: 1989), 47.

the tentative feel of life on a boat. Representations of patron saints, brought here from other shores, now line the interior walls of the sanctuary (Figure 5), holding memories of life and loss, and bridging distances in time and space.

The Research Problem

The question that I have been exploring in the context of this church and this community is that of the function and meaning of devotional practices for Italian immigrants, their children, and grandchildren. The function and meaning of devotional practices have been examined in a variety of research fields. William Meissner, a psychiatrist and Jesuit priest, has analyzed Catholic devotions as a psychological expression of symbiotic union with the mother.² Robert Orsi, a North American religious historian, has used historical research to illuminate the psychological and social dynamics of Italian Catholic immigrant faith in East Harlem³ and employed object relations theory to help him write a social history of American devotion to Saint Jude.⁴ Pastoral theologian Elaine Ramshaw has analyzed the ways in which religious ritual practices function as form of pastoral care.⁵ But no one has attempted to formulate an interdisciplinary study of devotional practices that integrates these analyses. What we have been lacking is a nuanced multi-generational study of Italian immigrants' devotional

² W. W. Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

³ Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁴ Robert A. Orsi, *Thank You, Saint Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

⁵ Elaine J. Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

practices that ties together historical, psychological, social, and pastoral-theological analyses and insights.

Rationale for an Interdisciplinary Study

Why do we need such a study? Why should pastoral theologians care about interweaving so many diverse disciplines into our already complicated theories and practices of care? Why should psychologists and pastoral counselors ponder the social history of immigration and religion? Why should social historians pause to entertain psychological theories of religious experience or theological approaches to pastoral care?

Let me begin to answer these questions from my perspective in the field of pastoral theology and care. I believe that it is important to bring insights from these three broad fields into conversation with each other in order to gain a richer and fuller appreciation for the interplay of immigration and religious experience and in order to gain greater competence in engaging in pastoral care and counseling in these contexts.

Because immigration is a little-studied phenomenon in pastoral theology, and because this experience is a critical one that can significantly influence persons, families, communities, and churches across several generations, the effort involved in the interdisciplinary endeavor is merited.

I have come to this conviction, in part, through my personal experience in graduate education. In the course of my studies at Claremont School of Theology over the last five years, I alternated taking courses in social history and immigration studies with courses in psychological and pastoral theory, while at the same time engaging in

clinical training at the Christian Counseling Service in Redlands, California. During this time, I found myself engaging in different kinds of learning, requiring differing sorts of insights and skills in order to process and comprehend ideas, emotions, and practices. I often found that my reading and experiential learning in one field or arena enhanced, complemented, or challenged the ideas and methods employed in another. For example, my clinical training turned out to be a resource for ethnographic interviewing. Likewise, I found that analytic tools from the material cultural study of religion helped me to bring greater attention to the role of visual objects and environments in clients' lives, thereby enhancing my capacity to "see" them and respond more competently as a pastoral counselor. Because pastoral-theological theory seeks to understand and treat persons holistically, i.e., to care intelligently for the whole person, we need the advantage of multiple lenses and ways of seeing human beings in relation to their socio-cultural contexts. The interdisciplinary endeavor is a comprehensive approach, through which we can gain sensitivity to the fullness and variety of ways in which religion is practiced, experienced, used, or discarded by particular persons in the context of immigration.

Another rationale for this interdisciplinary study, which I hope will address the interests and concerns of a broader audience, lies in the recognition of the complexity of human religious bonds. It was one of my teachers, Richard Niebuhr, who first brought to my attention one of the etymologies of the word, "religion." It is *religare*, meaning "to bind." Related words include ligature, ligament, and obligation. Religion binds or holds persons in relationship: with the divine and with one another. One definition of religion

is, “devotion to some principle: strict fidelity or faithfulness; conscientiousness; pious affection and attachment.”⁶ This study seeks to understand how religious bonds work in the context of immigration. Given that the process of immigration from one country to another involves to some degree the severing of bonds—bonds with the natal land, bonds with friends and family members, bonds with a way of life that is familiar if not fully satisfactory—it is fitting to explore the question of how people hold on to, let go of, and/or find themselves held by religious bonds during the course of this significant transition. In order to grasp fully what is involved in the rending and keeping of these bonds, we need to explore and describe these experiences with as much fullness and nuance as possible.

Italian Catholic devotional practices in San Pedro constitute a particular arena or field in which these bonds can be explored. Interdisciplinary research methods, including personal interviews, participant observation, and the study of historical documents, yield a rich data base through which we can explore questions such as these: How do the devotional practices foster bonds of attachment or affection in this context? What kind of hold do these bonds exert, if any, upon the children and grandchildren of immigrants? How is the practice of religion tied to place, history, ethnic identity or family loyalty? There are many different levels at which to look for answers to these questions, levels that point to the need for inter-disciplinary study. Psychological analysis, social-historical

⁶*Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed., s.v. “religion.”

analysis, and pastoral-theological analysis will yield distinct and yet inter-related explanations for how the bonds of religion function in this context.

Psychology

One way to look at this arena is from the perspective of psychology. If the immigration process is a significant transition in the life cycle involving intense emotional stress,⁷ what are the emotional needs, issues, and dynamics that particular devotional practices stir up, calm down, or enable persons to work through? Object relations theory, with its focus on infantile needs and bonds, offers a fitting psychological lens through which to view these dynamics. This is not to suggest that the religious devotions or the persons engaged in them are childish. Rather, it is to point to the depth and intensity of religious faith and practice and their capacity to touch human beings at a primal or basic level.

In San Pedro, Italian immigrants and their children have used devotional bonds to help them navigate a way through difficult times, involving economic struggles, hunger, loss and separation, and the challenges of making transitions to a new place. These religious practices involve both conservation of old patterns and styles of living and creative adaptations to new. Object relations theory assists us in understanding the ways in which the emotional intensity of these experiences is mirrored, mourned, or creatively transformed through devotional practices. These psychological processes cannot be fully

⁷ Elizabeth A. Carter and Monica McGoldrick, *The Family Life Cycle: A Frame Work for Family Therapy* (New York: Gardner Press, 1980), 388-90, 458-59; Monica McGoldrick, ed., *Re-Visioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture, and Gender in Clinical Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998).

understood, however, without attention to the particular social, cultural, and historical contexts of the devout.

Social History

Robert Orsi, in discussing his book *Thank You, Saint Jude*, said that he wanted to take the practice of prayer to Saint Jude and “sink it into social history.”⁸ In my view, it is not so much that we need to sink prayer into history, but that we need to refrain from excising peoples’ faith and practice out of the complexity of their lived experience. To treat devotional practices as merely psychological and/or theological exercises is to fail to recognize their embeddedness in material and cultural life. An historicized view of religion, what David Hall calls “lived religion,”⁹ understands religious practices to be in dynamic interaction with all of the social, economic, temporal, and spatial aspects of people’s lives. In San Pedro, it is perhaps more obvious than in other places that economic, material, social, and ethnic factors have influenced and been influenced by the religious bonds and loyalties of immigrants. There the physical and cultural landscapes bespeak transnational bonds, awarenesses, and identities. Thomas Tweed’s theoretical work on “translocative religion”¹⁰ can help us unpack some of the complexity of the meaning of place in religion and the capacity of religious experience to transport immigrants back to their old lands even as it assists them in the process of relocating

⁸ Robert Orsi, remarks given during a teleconference with Professor Hal Barron at Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, Calif., 20 Oct. 1999.

⁹ David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

themselves in the new. Yet in order to understand more fully the therapeutic and spiritual dimensions of the devout's religious practices, an additional lens is needed, that of pastoral theology and care.

Pastoral Theology and Care

The third dimension of this description and analysis is that of pastoral theology and care. In the descriptive portion of the study, I particularly highlight pastoral care, one of the obvious functions of the devotions in this setting. An emphasis on the therapeutic or "cure" dimensions of the devotions is suggested by the comments of a second-generation Italian woman in San Pedro whom I interviewed who said, "I'd rather do what I'm doing than go to a psychiatrist!"¹¹ These words point to the perceived mental health benefits of the devotions. This woman views her devotions as a spiritual alternative to secular therapy. She experiences the saints as sustaining and healing caregivers. The sentiments she expresses here are not atypical. In the course of my research in San Pedro, I often gained the impression that there is a kind of Catholic cognitive therapy frame implicit in the devotions, one that inspires strength and confidence. There is something about the ritual and repetitive nature of the devotions that appears to function in a way that is analogous to daily affirmations, offering some a hedge against depression and anxiety. Through repeating words and gestures, the devout give themselves and others conscious messages of hope and help.

¹¹ Interview #24.

The same woman quoted above handed me a holy card when I left her home—her effort, clearly, to minister to me. “Take this home and read it. It will make you feel so good,” she said, with confidence.¹² This vignette points to an aspect of the devotions that can only be described as pastoral care. There is a shepherding function of the devotions that sometimes involves clergy and sometimes does not. This care sometimes takes the form of an individual requesting supernatural aid or guidance from a saint. Sometimes the pastoral care is interpersonal—as in this woman’s effort to care for me. Sometimes the care is communal and liturgical, as when a priest presides over a devotional feast, lending his human presence and ecclesiastical authority to the prayers of the people. This care is sometimes related to cure, and accounts of miraculous intervention abound. It sometimes has more to do with acceptance or endurance. The pastoral care element of the devotions is also evident in the practical ministries that the devotions encourage—such as feeding the hungry, which at Mary Star parish is called “Christian Care.”

These three aspects of the devotions—psychological, socio-historical, and pastoral—taken together, can describe the multiple layers of function and meaning in the devotional practices more adequately than any single disciplinary approach. Once we have carefully crafted a picture of the devotional practices in their socio-cultural contexts, the pastoral-theological task of interpreting the value of the Italian Catholic devotions in San Pedro can be more fully undertaken. Elaine Graham calls this task the “critical phenomenology of pastoral practice.”¹³ This is the larger goal of this dissertation: not

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Elaine L. Graham. *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*

only to describe, but also to analyze, critique, and interpret the theological meanings that arise from the practice of devotions in this context.

Thesis

In the practice of their devotions to Mary, Jesus, the angels, and numerous patron saints, Italian Catholic immigrants have held on to, or experienced themselves as held by, bonds of memory, faith, and meaning. These bonds have met many psychological, social, pastoral, and ecclesiastical needs. These religious bonds helped sustain the immigrants, many of whom were fishermen or members of fishermen families, through times of economic crisis, loss at sea or fear of loss, and long periods of separation. Because these experiences were often emotionally charged or traumatic, the devotional practices in San Pedro have come to carry some of these memories and emotions. Memories of loved ones lost, crises averted, or fears endured have become woven into devotional practices. The devotions also capture something of the beauty and intensity of life lived in close proximity to the sea, a characteristic of life both in San Pedro and on the islands and coastline of Southern Italy. Through practices and stories, passed on to children and grandchildren, cultural, religious, and spatial bonds are continually made and remade.

Some of these particular ethnic and religious bonds include: visual bonds of attachment to religious art and artifacts; moral and ethical bonds, such as bonds to care for the poor; bonds of memory—memories of Italy, of relatives, of the dead; bonds of

(London: Mowbray, 1996), 209.

marriage and family, including obligations to personally care for one's elderly parents as well as one's children; bonds of affection for particular saints; bonds of indebtedness to a saint who has granted a favor; financial bonds to the church and religious societies; cultural bonds, such as speaking Italian and/or regional dialects, or cooking traditional foods, especially at holidays; finally, emotional bonds to the land, sea, and community of San Pedro, as well as to natal lands, which are frequently visited. These bonds continue to exert their presence in second and third immigrant generations, though in diverse forms and in varying degrees of intensity.

Structure of the Argument

The devotions are constituted by concrete religious practices, places, and habits that foster religious and cultural sensibilities. Children raised in environments where the devotions are practiced tend to gain not only the information that family members pass on to them in the form of stories, but also the bodily knowledge, or corporate memory, of the religious and cultural "sense worlds"¹⁴ of the devout. This embodied knowledge is the more recondite for its unquestioned quality, the way in which certain religious habits or objects are accepted as just part of life. "It's just the way it always was,"¹⁵ as one woman put it. These shared meanings, habits, and images that characterize the devotional practices function in turn to preserve religious structures in this setting.¹⁶

¹⁴ I take this term from the work of Robert Orsi. See Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*, 193-95.

¹⁵ Interview #27.

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 83-84.

In the three descriptive chapters, I elucidate the ways in which the bodily knowledge of particular Italian Catholic sensibilities is communicated and absorbed through the devotional practices in the course of everyday life. These are understood to be dynamic processes, encountered and expressed in diverse ways. The three topics or fields that I consider here are: the visual aspects of devotions; the influence of fishing industry; and the religious meaning of food, with corollaries to constructions of class, gender, and ethnic identity. The exploration of these topics constitutes the three descriptive chapters. In each of these chapters, I use data from the interviews to demonstrate processes of resistance, change, and durability across the generations.

I use these three topics because they strike me as the most salient features of the devotional practices. There is an immediacy to visual piety and food rituals: they are aspects of the devotions that are compelling, concrete, and perceptible through the senses. While singing hymns or praying the rosary are also common devotional practices involving the senses, they are not as consistently practiced or described by the devout in this context. Similarly, the impact of the fishing industry stands out as a striking dimension of the devotional practices in this setting. This research field is different from the other two in that it is not an immediately perceptible concrete feature of all of the devotional practices. However, the fishing industry has had a central role in drawing Italian immigrants (as well as others) to the region, in shaping financial and other material dimensions of the history of Mary Star of the Sea Parish, and in shaping the fears, hopes, prayers, and identities of many of the devout. Thus these three fields—visual aspects of

the devotions, the impact of the fishing industry, and the religious meaning of food—give us access to understanding some of the primary ways in which the devotional practices have worked and continue to work in this setting.

In Chapter 2, “On Seeing and Being Seen,” I argue for the importance of the visual representations of Mary, Jesus, the angels, and the saints. These religious images are everywhere to be seen. They are found not only in the churches, but also in the homes, boats, and back yards of the devout. The significance of these visual surroundings and religious artifacts should not be underestimated, nor their pastoral value overlooked. I rely on David Morgan’s concept of “visual piety,” which argues for the profound role that religious images play in the process of social construction.¹⁷

This chapter has a particularly psychological cast. I rely on the theories of D. W. Winnicott and Heinz Kohut and their concepts of the “transitional realm” and “mirroring.” The examination of the psychological dynamics at play in the practice of visual devotions gives way to an understanding of their pastoral functions. Over the course of three generations, a capacity for visual piety remains in evidence. Through seeing and being seen, the devout and their offspring experience, make use of, change, and/or hold fast to their faith.

Chapter 3, “Fishing, Fear, and Faith,” inclines toward historical analysis. Topics covered here include the rise and fall of the fishing industry, its financial benefits for some as well as its dangers and difficulties. Experiences of losing loved ones at sea, and

¹⁷ David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 7.

of fearing for this kind of loss, are explored. Also, I describe the financial support that Mary Star of the Sea has derived from the fishing industry and two of the major collective rituals related to fishing: the Fisherman's Fiesta and the Blessing of the Fleet. The realities of the occupation of fishing, with its extreme risks and benefits, have functioned to intensify the devotions for some and helped to promote the practice of devotions into the third immigrant generation. I placed this chapter between the other two descriptive chapters in order to emphasize the central role of this material and in order to express, through the structure of this narrative, the ways in which this historical experience is thickly interwoven into the other aspects of the devotions.

In Chapter 4, "Food, Famine, and Faith," I describe the relatively recent and lively Sicilian ritual of the St. Joseph's Table as it is practiced in San Pedro. I suggest a connection between poverty remembered and the cultural importance of food. The prevalence of pastoral care programs that feed the poor is also described. This chapter is tilted toward social analysis. Issues of class, gender, and ethnic maintenance are explored in this context. The importance of dining room tables, hospitality, communion, and community suggest a sacramental view of food that persists into the later generations.

The argument culminates in Chapter 5, "Holding On, Letting Go, and Being Held: Pastoral-Theological Analysis." Here I examine the meaning of the devotional practices through the interpretive lens of pastoral theology and care. This chapter relies on the theoretical work of Elaine Graham¹⁸ to argue that pastoral-theological analysis should be

¹⁸ Graham, *Transforming Practice*.

rooted in the study of actual religious practices in their cultural contexts. Because they engage aesthetic, religious, and cultural sensibilities, devotional practices reveal what Clifford Geertz might describe as a religious sophistication that is not theologically self-conscious.¹⁹ Graham's methodological guidance helps excavate and clarify the religious sophistication that inheres in these practices.

In this chapter I also explore, evaluate, and interpret three religious values that arise out of these practices. In order to do this, I wander back over some of the examples and insights presented in earlier chapters, and weave in some new material, in order to take the argument to deeper levels of interpretation. I demonstrate the interrelationships between psychological, historical, social, and pastoral insights, weaving previous points together into a more coherent whole. In this chapter, I allow my own voice to come through more clearly, in conversation with the voices of the devout.

In Chapter 6, "Conclusion, Contribution, and Implications for Pastoral Theology and Care," I conclude the argument and describe the dissertation's scholarly contributions. I then propose some possible directions for future research in the context of San Pedro. Additionally, I indicate connections that I perceive between this dissertation and current approaches in the field of pastoral theology. Finally, I propose a number of implications of this dissertation for the theory and practice of pastoral care and counseling.

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 106.

Methodology

Research Methods

This is an ethnographic study of the practice of Italian devotions in San Pedro. I employed three research methods: participant observation, qualitative interviewing, and the examination of historical documents. As a novice ethnographer, I relied heavily upon Hammersley and Atkinson's practical and theoretic guidance in conducting the research.²⁰ During the course of a year, I traveled to San Pedro from my home in Riverside regularly to observe, interview, participate, scan documents at the local public library and the San Pedro Bay Historical Society, sit in church, and/or walk the beach. I met and spoke with several persons in the community, including the pastor and other members of the pastoral staff of Mary Star Parish, several Episcopal clergy persons in the area, some restaurant owners and patrons, and the staff at the San Pedro Bay Historical Society. I also acquired copies of two small research projects previously conducted in San Pedro by the Italian Oral History Institute at the University of California Los Angeles.

I attended several masses and special events at Mary Star parish. I videotaped Saint Joseph's Table celebration in March, having spent the previous day observing the preparations. I viewed videotapes of other feast day celebrations, attended two May crownings of Mary, and brought my children to the church's annual Fiesta in July. I was a guest at a meeting of the Italian Catholic Federation, and attended a fund-raising dinner

²⁰ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1995).

hosted by the San Pietro Society. I conducted six informational interviews with persons in the community including the pastor of Mary Star, Father Patrick Gallagher, and others.

The thirty-one taped interviews I conducted constitute the centerpiece of the research. Because I was interested in learning something about how the devotions transmit information, habits, and faith from one generation to the next, I chose the ethnographic model called the snowball sample. This is a way of selecting persons to interview who are connected to one another, either through kinship, friendship, religious, or professional association. In San Pedro, I soon learned, many residents seem to think of the whole Italian population as one big snowball. People seem to be thickly connected—to know or know of each other fairly frequently and well. When I use the term “community,” however, I am not referring to the whole Italian population, but to the particular group of people whom I have gotten to know.

I gained access to this community largely through the connection I formed with one woman, whom I have named “Rosa” in this narrative. Rosa questioned me intently when I first met her, asking me over and over again, “Why? Why are you doing this?” When I finally thought it through enough to offer her a satisfactory answer, she opened wide the gate of friendship, both personally and in the community. I am aware that Rosa also functioned as a “gatekeeper,” steering me toward and away from interviews with various individuals. In order to compensate for the limitations this imposed, I also sought out interviews on my own, as well as through the recommendations and connections of each interviewee. As a result, my sample and my records of participant observation

include interactions with a spectrum of people that is broad enough to exhibit considerable variety and to include some degree of conflict.

Though I began by interviewing members of Mary Star parish, in the end the sample was not limited to this particular congregation. As time went by, my interviewees informed me about the existence of several additional Catholic churches in the San Pedro Bay area—totaling five by my last count.²¹ My sample included some members or relatives of members of each of these faith communities. Most of the people I interviewed were quite devout. Some might be considered religious virtuosos. Some were suggested to me as good representatives of the Italian Catholic community in San Pedro. But the sample also includes one immigrant who is an atheist, one self-described “fallen-away Catholic,” and one second-generation woman who converted to Protestant theology. In the later generations, I encountered a greater range in the level of devotion and variety of practices.

The persons I interviewed ranged from ages twenty-four to ninety-one. They were mostly bi-lingual: only five of the interviews were conducted partly in Italian. Most of the interviews were conducted in peoples’ homes, at kitchen or dining room tables, often overlooking the sea. In most cases, I was permitted to photograph religious art and home altars. In some cases, I met family members or friends, who sometimes contributed to the conversation. While most interviews were conducted individually, some were done with

²¹ These churches are: Saint Margaret-Mary, Saint Peter’s, Holy Trinity, Little Sisters of the Poor, and Mission Stella Maris. I am not sure that these are all considered separate “churches” in the strictest sense. But they are faith communities with their own clergy and distinct locations and styles.

couples, and one in the context of a dinner party. I was frequently the recipient of great hospitality on these visits. Italian coffee and homemade cookies—often with a plate to take home—were generously offered. About half of the time, I managed to plan ahead enough to bring a small gift—such as a loaf of bread or a coffee cake—as an expression of thanks and as a way of participating in the exchange of hospitality.

The interviews lasted anywhere from one to three hours, the average being about two hours. They were semi-structured. By this I mean that I tried to strike a balance between asking my questions and allowing people to talk more freely, following their sense about what was most important. The questions I started with are included in an appendix to the dissertation. However, I want to stress that I did not use these lists in the spirit of questionnaires, with the aim of logging quantitative results. The sample is simply too small to yield statistically significant information. Rather, I used the questions in order to lead into a few general areas of inquiry. The main areas that I explored included the family's immigration story, past and current devotional practices, ties to the fishing industry, and the meaning that all of this had for the person I was interviewing. If a person seemed to focus on a particular religious celebration or event or issue, I would try to follow his or her lead, even if it meant that we did not cover all of the questions.

Using this semi-structured approach often led, as I hoped it would, to the devout's sharing of deep personal stories. I felt, at times, torn between my role as an ethnographer probing for meaning and my pastoral inclination to offer support or comfort in these moments. I felt an ethical obligation to tend this balance, not wanting to unwittingly

move into a counseling role, nor to go so deep that interviewees were left feeling unraveled. After the first few interviews, I learned to allow extra time after the interview for something like debriefing—moving gently away from the intense stories into a more social and casual conversation.

Karen McCarthy Brown, in her introduction to *Mama Lola*, asserts that ethnography is a form of human relationship.²² I have felt this to be true in my research. I have tried to honor the relationships that have been formed, with clear ethical guidelines for my writing. I asked all of my thirty-one personal interviewees to sign release forms giving me permission to make audiotape recordings of the interviews. I noted on these forms that I would not use interviewees' real names in any writing or publications related to this research. (A copy of the release form I used is included in the Appendix). In the writing of this dissertation, I have gone a step further in order to protect the privacy of the persons I interviewed, by altering or omitting some personal details included in their accounts. While most of the persons I interviewed did not express any particular concern about anonymity, and a few expressly gave me permission to use their real names, I have decided it is best to be consistent and use pseudonyms throughout. I found the selection of pseudonyms complicated, because many persons I interviewed venerated the saints after whom they were named. In these cases, I chose not to alter the names of the saints, nor to draw attention to this connection. Also, there are several names that are so common in this community—names such as Maria and Josephine—that I could not resist

²²Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 12.

using them fictitiously, though I was careful not to use them for the persons whose names they actually are. This may prove confusing or troublesome to the devout if they should read the dissertation, or any publications that may derive from it.

In the case of the six informational interviews with members of the community, I took notes but in most cases did not make audiotapes. I explained my purpose in collecting research for the dissertation, and received verbal rather than written permission to do this. There was one case in which I did make an audiotape of an informational interview. In the course of this interview, some of the material discussed shaded over into the personal realm. I made a verbal agreement with the interviewee (on tape), stating that I would not associate the person's real name with the personal story shared. I gave this personal story a separate interview number.

I both taped and took hand-written notes during the bulk of the thirty-one core interviews. Afterwards, I listened to all of the tapes at least once. I did not transcribe them. I used my hand-written notes to help me navigate my way through the tapes when I wanted to check direct quotes, and then transcribed small portions of the tapes. The tapes will remain in my personal possession. Though I was invited to deposit these tapes in the collection of the Italian Oral History Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, I had to decline in light of my verbal and written agreements to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

One other element of my research is the use of photographs. My interviewees were gracious in allowing me to photograph their religious art, artifacts, altars, and

shrines. Some individuals asked me to take their pictures. I have avoided using names in the captions accompanying the figures used in this dissertation in order to err on the side of caution and protection of anonymity. I also took photographs of the sanctuary at Mary Star, some of which include worshippers and participants in devotional events. Finally, there are some photographs included that I took in public places in San Pedro. All photographs used here are my own.

Reflexivity

It seems important to say something about my place in the research as well as in the writing of this narrative. Of course the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle applies—the practices I studied were undoubtedly affected by my presence and my attempts to study them. My questions shape the narrative, even though I attempted to conduct the interviews in a flexible and open fashion. The issues and images that I observed, noticed, and commented upon are inevitably selective. I made an attempt to approach the study “with open hands,” to borrow from the language of Henri Nouwen.²³ I made an effort to come to the research without judgment, to see what is going on in and through the practice of the devotions, and not just to gather evidence to support a theory. Nevertheless, it is my view of the devotions and not the devotions themselves that the reader will find described here. I am aware of the distance between the practices studied and my interpretations of them.²⁴

²³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1972).

²⁴ For an excellent explanation of this understanding of reflexivity, see Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Knowing that this is so, I want to be as transparent as possible in my descriptions of my interactions in San Pedro, and as clear as possible about the lenses, motivations, and meanings I bring to this study. When Rosa pushed me hard to say why it was I wanted to do this research, I came to realize that alongside my scholarly interests, a very personal motivation was right beneath the surface. It is, quite simply, that I miss my grandmother. Assunta Caivano was my Italian immigrant maternal grandmother, who lived to be ninety-eight years old, and died just five years ago. In her home, she had colorful pictures and statues of saints. The saints on her bedroom dresser wore shiny satin clothes that could thrill a small child's heart. There was a perpetual candle burning in front of these saints, adding a sense of drama and danger. My grandmother also had a backyard shrine to Mary, which I used to help her tend and adorn with bouquets of fresh flowers. I think that I remember something magical and mystical about her and her piety, something she communicated through the unceasing clicking of her rosary beads and the similarly persistent quality of her love. I think that I wanted to do this study so that I could try to refresh my own affective bonds of memory to Assunta, to bring back some sense of her and of the aura of her Italian Catholic faith.

Does this mean that I bring a degree of sentimentality or nostalgia to the study, an inclination to see the positive sides of the culture and the people interviewed more than their limitations? Probably. Additionally, there is the risk that I will at times over-identify with the people here, and obfuscate their West-coast experience of immigrant religion with my East-coast (specifically, northern New Jersey) experiences. The danger

is that my practical knowledge of Italian Catholic faith—the same knowledge that motivates my interest and helps me gain access to the Italian Catholic community in San Pedro—can get in the way of my ability to see and appreciate the distinct experiences of the devout in this setting.

An example of this dynamic occurred during an interview with a third-generation woman who has stopped attending Mass. The woman waited until after I had finished the interview and turned off the tape-recorder before she looked at me meaningfully, and, resting her head on her hands, asked, “Do you have *the guilt*?”²⁵ While a non-Italian Catholic researcher might have asked the woman to be more specific about the guilt she had in mind, I found myself compelled to utter a hearty “yes” without hesitation. The problem with this response is that it was based on my experience and my sense of identification with the woman. While I had an awareness of the complex combination of factors that may have constituted or contributed to the guilt the woman spoke of, I did not actually know what particular guilt she was referring to. Was it Catholic guilt for leaving the church? Was it female guilt for working outside the home? Was it Italian guilt for marrying a non-Italian? Was it a more generalized guilt for the sin of self-definition or for the good fortune of wealth and healthy children? Eventually, when I had recovered enough from the question, I did query the woman, to find out the specific sources of her guilt. But my inclination in the moment she asked the question was not to be curious, but

²⁵ Interview #21.

to go with a gut feeling of identification. This feeling led me at least momentarily to assume that I knew exactly what she meant. Even now, I'm not entirely sure that I didn't.

Italian immigrants to the West Coast have historically met with very different circumstances and fortunes than those who made their home in the Northeastern states, as my grandparents did.²⁶ While there are some Italian Catholic experiences and emotions that seem to transcend these differences, I do not hold an essentialist view of ethnic or cultural characteristics as fixed attributes of a population. So, while I do think that my Italian heritage has helped imbue my ethnographic relationships in San Pedro with a sense of connection, I am also well aware of the differences between my experience and that of the persons I interviewed. My clinical training in pastoral counseling and interpathic listening skills has enhanced my capacity to listen for these differences, occasional lapses notwithstanding.

One difference in my experience that I think is significant enough to mention here has to do with my religious identity. Though I was raised and educated as a Roman Catholic, during my teenage years I left the Catholic Church. In my adulthood, I eventually found my way to divinity school and to ordination in the United Church of Christ. While I have taken issue with Catholic church structures and beliefs over the years, disagreeing with popes and bishops on various points, I do not write this dissertation with a "chip on my shoulder," or out of a personal need to criticize the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In fact, in many ways, I still feel myself to be a Catholic, at least

²⁶ Micaela di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender among California Italian-Americans* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

a cultural one, and so my sense of affection for the church or nostalgia for what I miss about it is likely to be the greater bias in this writing.

Some of the Catholics I spoke with in San Pedro were troubled, I think, when I told them that I was a member of the United Church of Christ. One immigrant refused an interview outright when she asked about my religious affiliation and I used the word "Protestant." Language difficulties may have played a role here; I also got the impression that the woman was afraid I was planning to try to convert her. After that experience, I refrained from declaring my religious affiliation on the telephone when setting up the interviews. I identified myself as a student and a researcher. I began the interviews by asking if the interviewee had any questions about me or my research, and I answered these questions openly. Many of the people I interviewed told me that they were praying for me. Some prayed I would get an "A" on this dissertation. Others had my soul in mind; they were praying that this research might lead me to convert back to Catholicism. In the course of the research, there were times when I wondered about this possibility myself. I often sought the chance to spend time in the Mary Star sanctuary alone. Perhaps I was experiencing the ethnographer's oft-cited inclination to "go native." In the course of my research and writing, I found much that was and is appealing to me in the faith worlds that the devout so generously shared with me. I remain grateful to the devout for all of their help and for all of their prayers.

When I read Karen McCarthy Brown's critical study, noted above, I gained some insight into the logic of Vodou, at least as it is practiced by a Haitian immigrant priestess

in Brooklyn. Brown's study, which she described as "an intimate spiritual biography,"²⁷ was researched and written through the medium of the relationship that Brown established with the priestess. I have not attempted to develop my relationships with the devout in this setting at nearly the same depth, nor to use my experience of those interactions as the medium for the writing in the same way that Brown does. But I have formed relationships to the persons I interviewed, relationships that involve trust and respect. I want to honor that trust and respect by describing the devotions in a way that will help reveal their meaning, logic, and value to readers who are unfamiliar with San Pedro or Italian Catholic devotional faith worlds.

I can illustrate my concern by relating a story recently told to me by a colleague and friend. My colleague is a pastoral theologian and a member of the clergy in a mainline Protestant denomination. She had just visited the home of a Filipino immigrant woman. In the living room of this woman's small home was a large statue of Mary—so large that it took up a good portion of the room. My friend said she simply could not understand why someone would have such a thing in her home. "That space could be *used*," she said intensely; "I don't get it." This comment made me think of Bourdieu's famous claim: "Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician."²⁸ In the logic of the immigrant's faith practice, the space in the woman's house *is* being used. It is being used to meet some spiritual need, perhaps as a focus for prayer, perhaps as a symbol of

²⁷ Brown, *Mama Lola*, ix.

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1990), 86.

blessing or protection. But the statue is being used in a way that doesn't seem logical to my colleague. I hope that this study will help open up the logic of immigrant Catholic devotional practices to my friend as well as to other colleagues in pastoral theology.

Many times in the course of my interviews, someone would confide a story to me with a preface such as, "Anyone but you would think I was crazy, but this is what happened." These stories usually had some sense of wonder to them, some hint of the miraculous if not a direct claim of supernatural intervention. I want to relay these faith stories in such a way that the reader will not think the persons telling them "crazy" at all, but will come to understand the way that this faith and these stories work. At the same time, in the interest of creating a fuller and more complex narrative, one that reflects the contested claims about the devotions within this setting, I have included the comments of some persons in this setting who disagree with each other. For example, one man clearly stated that he thinks the devotions are delusions. My position is, to some degree, one of advocacy for the devout; I advocate for respect for the persons involved and for the wisdom of their devotional practices. This stance is not, in my view, a hindrance to some objective critical truth.²⁹ It is, rather, simply a feature of the relationship that constitutes this particular ethnography.

²⁹ For a thoughtful discussion of issues of truth and objectivity in social analysis, see Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Re-Making of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

Analytic Methods

Material Cultural Studies

The method that I use to interpret my observations of material aspects of the devotions relies on a paradigm described in a survey article by Colleen McDannell, "Interpreting Things: Material Culture Studies and American Religion."³⁰ McDannell offers a concise description of a method for obtaining cultural information from material evidence. The method involves three stages: description, analysis, and interpretation. The first stage, description, involves noting the design, style, production, distribution, and patronage of things, with great care and attention. My decision to include photographs in the research is, in part, a result of my effort to follow McDannell's lead in recognizing the importance of things.³¹ The second stage, analysis, involves looking at the object's functions, in the sense of Robert Merton's "manifest functions,"³² functions which are "intended and recognized by the participants in the culture."³³ McDannell draws attention to the importance of "understanding how the article or environment fits into conventional theological, ritual, or ethical structures."³⁴ This stage of analysis may include popular functions that are not condoned by the clergy, but are admitted by the participants. There will likely be multiple functions of an artifact, both in a single

³⁰ Colleen McDannell, "Interpreting Things: Material Culture Studies and American Religion," *Religion* 21 (1991): 371-87.

³¹ Also see Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

³² Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, rev. ed. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957), 19-84.

³³ McDannell, "Interpreting Things," 375.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 376.

moment and across time.³⁵ The third stage, interpretation, involves describing what Merton calls “latent functions.”³⁶ Here the scholar examines the symbolic value of material culture, looking for intrinsic meanings that may go beyond the avowed purpose of the article or environment. Here is where McDannell grants that “the scholar is free to explore possible but unprovable conclusions.”³⁷

McDannell comments on the value and difficulty of incorporating the study of material culture into the study of religion. Because the study of material culture tends to emphasize the commonplace, it counters the elitist bias inherent in many written sources.³⁸ The study of material culture is difficult because it requires fieldwork, looking for and at artifacts that have not previously been considered historically valuable. However, she claims, material cultural studies can help advance the goal of struggling with the meaning of the sacred in everyday American life.³⁹

I have utilized McDannell’s method in describing religious art and artifacts in this setting. I have also tried to apply it to my study of religious rituals and to my analysis of the religious importance of food. In following this methodology in the writing itself, I tried to describe the data first, articulate stated meanings and official explanations, and finally add my own layers of interpretation. For this reason, the chapter on pastoral-theological interpretations follows the three descriptive chapters. I chose this

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Merton, 19-84.

³⁷ McDannell, “Interpreting Things,” 377.

³⁸ Ibid., 381.

³⁹ Ibid., 382.

methodology in order to avoid, as much as possible, confusing descriptive explanations with normative interpretations.

“Transforming Practice”

The methodological choice to offer “thick description” first, before moving to the more complex and/or normative forms of interpretation, is consistent with pastoral theologian Elaine Graham’s call for making Christian practice the foundation of pastoral theological reflection. In her book, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, Graham suggests that pastoral theologians who are striving to incorporate the insights of post-modernism, especially as it highlights the importance of historical and cultural contexts, might “turn to practice as the focus of contemporary pastoral theology.”⁴⁰ Graham elaborates.

Thus, critical studies of religion as a specific form of cultural practice might help to disclose its contribution in building subcultures of institutional and individual reality through which particular patterns of social relations are generated. Christian practice is not just the acting out of predetermined moral norms, or application of doctrinal truths. Pastoral practices, as expressions of the Christian presence in the world, may therefore be seen as the foundation, and not the application of theological understanding.⁴¹

According to Graham, shared as well as individual theological understandings are disclosed through religious practices, and it is here that social relations are generated. By advocating for Christian practices and/or pastoral practices to be viewed as the foundation of theological understanding, Graham hopes to train the gaze of contemporary pastoral

⁴⁰ Graham, 96.

⁴¹ Ibid., 111.

theology on the sites where social relations and religious values are expressed, enacted, and/or brought into being. Thus Graham calls pastoral theology to a phenomenological mode of enquiry, through which the values that are embedded in action can be discerned and interpreted.⁴² This venture, as Graham defines it, requires “studying a living and acting faith-community in order to excavate and examine the norms which inhabit pastoral praxis.”⁴³

In this study of Italian Catholic devotional practices in San Pedro, I attempt to apply Graham’s methodological scheme. Thus I engage in ethnographic study, describe and analyze religious practices in their complex expression, and then move to a pastoral-theological analysis that is more phenomenological than prescriptive. In this analysis, I “excavate” religious values that are based in practice, evaluate the transformative and life-giving potential of devotional practices, and try to articulate and interpret what Graham calls the “practical wisdom”⁴⁴ embedded in these practices. This approach will help reveal the theological understandings of the people themselves, highlighting their embodied knowledge of God, themselves, and their faith worlds. This theoretical paradigm, which relies on the thought of Pierre Bourdieu,⁴⁵ informs my analytic method.

⁴² Ibid., 209.

⁴³ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁵ See Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice; and Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

Definitions, Scope, and Limitations

Catholic Devotional Practices

Catholic devotional practices are the focal point of the study. Traditionally, these practices have been defined as forms of prayer to Mary, Jesus, the angels, or the saints. Through prayer, the devout establish a relationship with one of these lesser deities, who serves as a mediator, a model of saintly living, or an intercessor with the Almighty. Devotional practices include such activities as prayer, singing, touching holy water, medals, or relics, gazing at holy images or cards, saying the rosary, fasting, lighting candles, keeping novenas (continuous prayer marathons), and celebrating feast days of the saints with ritual processions, traditional foods, and special clothing. For the purposes of this study, I began by looking at these kinds of explicitly pious and Catholic activities in this setting, and asking people what they meant to them.

I explored, in as much detail as possible, the material cultural dimensions of the devotions. This led me to include some activities that might not be considered religious at all, such as one man's role in organizing the practical details of a feast day celebration, involving such tasks as writing letters to government officials in order to obtain city permits for the procession in the street. Raising money for the church, money often donated in the name of a particular patron saint, is another example of an activity that is not explicitly pious, but is nevertheless crucial to maintaining the devotional practices. Caring for statues by dusting them or decorating them with lights or flowers, donating and preparing food for the Saint Joseph's Table feast, sewing traditional garments and

selecting people to play parts in sacred dramas—these are all substantial and time-consuming activities that express the devotion of the people.

I expanded my working definition of devotional practices in an additional way when I began interviewing members of the later immigrant generations. Because I was probing for the effects of parents' and grandparents' devotional practices on younger generations, I scanned the walls of people's homes as well as their words and interactions, searching for remnants or scraps of these earlier practices. This approach led me to discover some forms of devotional practice that are not apparently Catholic or Italian—such as Reiki healing, or the use of a Native American dream-catcher. I was struck by the number of innovative combinations of religious practices and artifacts that emerged from this inquiry. In many cases, I found practices that constituted, if not a seamless garment, a tapestry of faith and practice that appeared to be woven into or over the ways of the older generations—something far more substantive than scraps. Therefore, I have intentionally included a broad range of habits, images, artifacts, feelings, objects, and conditions that are in some way related to religious devotion in this setting.

Italian Immigrants to San Pedro

While San Pedro is a multi-ethnic community and Mary Star is a multi-ethnic church, I chose to limit the scope of my study to Italian immigrants, in order to increase the depth of the interviews and analysis. Practically speaking, my own Italian heritage and language skills both motivated me and helped me gain access to this population. I

wanted to be able to explore the ways in which immigration from Italy and later generations' constructions of ethnicity influenced religious practices and vice-versa. Interconnections between and among individuals from various ethnic groups are noted and explored, but not extensively. An inter-ethnic investigation is beyond the scope of this research. The central axis of comparison in this analysis is multi-generational rather than multi-ethnic. The psychological dynamics identified in this context may set the stage for future study of intercultural dynamics within the congregation (see Chapter 6).

I chose San Pedro, California as the location of my study in part because there is a large concentration of Italian immigrants and their descendants living there. Exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, but local phone books, with several pages of "Russos," for example, give some indication of the size of this population, which has been estimated at ten to twenty thousand.⁴⁶ Italians have been arriving in San Pedro since the 1880s, and have constituted one of the primary immigrant groups of Mary Star of the Sea parish since its beginning in 1888.

Italians in San Pedro come from all over Italy, but the two largest groups come from the southern islands of Ischia and Sicily. Ischia, a small island in the Bay of Naples, is the natal land of the majority of Italian immigrants to San Pedro. Many noted the physical resemblance of San Pedro's landscape to the fishing villages from whence they came. Several persons offered the suggestion to me that Ischia is to Naples what Catalina Island is to San Pedro, referring to the size and proximity of these places relative to each

⁴⁶ Informational interview #5.

other. The second largest group of immigrants comes from Sicily. These two groups are well-represented in this study, but persons from other parts of Italy are included as well.

I refer to the persons who are the subject of my research as Italian immigrants and their descendants. I have intentionally tried to refrain from giving them identities such as "Italian American." I do this in order to avoid objectifying and stereotyping them. Instead, I tried to invite people talk about their ethnic identity in their own words. Without making this the central focus of the dissertation, I do pay attention to the constructs of ethnic identity that the devout invoke or invent for themselves. I have found a great variety of constructions of religious and ethnic identity in this setting.⁴⁷

Three Generations

I set out looking for thirty persons to interview, persons who I hoped would be evenly spread over three immigrant generations—that is, ten Italian immigrants, ten members of the second generation (the first generation born here), and ten members of the third generation. I expected to have a difficult time finding immigrants and rushed to interview the oldest persons first, for fear this generation would die out before I could get to them. I was greatly surprised to discover, however, that this was not the case. I soon learned that I would have no shortage of immigrants to interview, because unlike in other parts of the country, Italian immigration is a continuing phenomenon in San Pedro. This was perhaps the biggest surprise of the study and the most historically significant finding.

⁴⁷ Regarding the construction of ethnicity, see Werner Sollors, ed., *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawski, George E. Pozzeta, and Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (1992): 3-41; di Leonardo, *Varieties of Ethnic Experience*.

As the reader can imagine, my preconceptions about immigration, age, and language were completely upended. For example, a woman I interviewed, when asked about her journey here, said her plane landed at LAX (Los Angeles International Airport) in the seventies. Certainly this was no Oscar Handlin saga. I also interviewed several second-generation young women who had intentionally gone back to Italy or Sicily to marry, and brought their husbands with them back to San Pedro. In sum, there was no shortage of immigrants to interview, and the age range of the immigrants I did find was a good deal wider than expected. My greatest practical difficulty was in finding adult members of the later generations who were willing to be interviewed. In particular, it was difficult for me to find members of the third-generation who did not consider themselves to be particularly religious who were willing to be interviewed. Thus the study is skewed toward those who engage in devotional or religious practice of some kind.

While I anticipated that inter-ethnic marriage would complicate my sample in the later generations, I did not anticipate the messiness of defining the generations. Most research deems persons who immigrated under the age of twelve or fourteen members of the “one and a half” generation, because they usually learn English quickly and perform roles that are in many ways analogous to members of the second generation—translating for their parents, and bearing the brunt of the conflicts involved in processes of assimilation or cultural interaction. I then wasn’t sure how to classify their children. A “two and a half” designation seemed to signify less. Also, I found persons whose parents were of different generations, so I started coding them with fractions such as two-thirds

generation, meaning second generation via the maternal side, and third generation paternal. The messiness of all of this made me glad to be doing a qualitative rather than a quantitative study.

Pastoral

In this dissertation, I am defining the term “pastoral” broadly. I include the familiar meaning of pastoral care, which has to do with the spiritual and emotional care-giving functions of clergy and other representatives of the church, as in the good shepherd metaphor. I also include the more prophetic or social-justice oriented notions of “pastoral” which have emerged from Latin American liberation theologies. Gustavo Gutiérrez’ understanding of “praxis” is helpful here: “a transforming activity marked and illuminated by Christian love.”⁴⁸ In this understanding of pastoral care, social transformation is seen as the compelling pastoral response to the needs of the people.⁴⁹ A pastoral response to immigrants, then, includes attention to economic as well as spiritual and emotional needs. Perhaps Elaine Graham’s definition gets at the broadest meaning of the term. She speaks of “‘pastoral’ as denoting the experiential, contextual and lived

⁴⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), xxx, cited in Graham, 131.

⁴⁹ Graham, 133. U.S. Latino theologian Harold Recinos calls for a similar understanding of pastoral care in the context of the American *barrio*. He writes, “Rereading the mission of the church from the perspective of marginal humanity will enable the church to discover the authentic Christian pastoral activity means participating in God’s struggle to right the human condition by enabling trampled humanity to know historical salvation.” Harold J. Recinos, “Mission: A Latino Pastoral Theology,” in *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective*, ed. Arturo J. Bañuelas (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 136.

situation of an entire community of faith.”⁵⁰ I am using this fuller meaning of “pastoral” that includes a concern for social context and communal dimensions of care.

Contribution and Related Literature

This is an interdisciplinary study, which I hope will contribute to the literature in three fields: psychology of religion, American religious history, and pastoral theology and care. My approach to exploring the psychological dynamics of a religious practice is of course indebted to William James and his emphasis on the function and value of religious experience. I rely heavily on the insights of object relations theorists, especially Donald Woods Winnicott (1896-1971), a pediatrician and psychoanalyst in the British object relations school. I draw particularly on Winnicott’s theory of transitional space, influenced by his observation of babies and their mothers, as well as by his clinical work in analysis with children and adults. This theory, articulated in *Playing and Reality*⁵¹ and *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*,⁵² draws attention to the importance of the experience of illusion in healthy development. I use Winnicott’s concepts to help explore the psychological meaning and value of illusory aspects of the devotional practices.

My study is in some ways similar to the work of interpreters of religious experience who use object relations theory, such as Ana Maria Rizzuto, who analyzes

⁵⁰ Graham, 130-31.

⁵¹ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1971).

⁵² D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965).

God images as parental introjects, and William Meissner, who offers specific analysis of Catholic devotions as a form of symbiotic union with the mother.⁵³

This study is also related to the work of several North American religious historians. Many historians eschew psychological analysis, fearing its universalizing tendencies.⁵⁴ However, the work of Robert Orsi and Ann Taves demonstrates the usefulness of psychological theory in interpreting religious history. Taves' *The Household of Faith* calls attention to some of the psychological dynamics at play in American Catholics' devotional practices in the nineteenth century, and, I think, beyond.⁵⁵ Orsi's *The Madonna of 115th Street* first got me thinking about it the other way: in this case, historical study helps to illuminate psychological dynamics of Italian Catholic experience. It is the interplay of these analyses that I find so fascinating, and as a pastoral caregiver, helpful. Orsi's more recent *Thank You, Saint Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* explicitly employs object relations theory. In these books, psychological processes are situated within and shown to be related to larger socio-cultural processes. I will emulate this approach, adding an emphasis on pastoral theology and care.

⁵³ Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*.

⁵⁴ In my view, there have been some heavy-handed attempts at "psycho-history" that warrant historians' skepticism. See, for example, Lloyd DeMause, ed., *The New Psychohistory* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1975). However misguided some of these works may be, the wholesale rejection of psychological theory or research is also erroneous. See William McKinley Runyan, ed., *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁵⁵ Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

Because Orsi's work addresses Italian American religion, I will briefly note two ways in which my findings in San Pedro differ from Orsi's findings in his East Harlem and Jude studies. The first difference is that there is a sizable Italian population in San Pedro, which seems to be fed by a small but continuous stream of new immigrants. Italian ethnicity does not appear to be as significantly attenuated in this context (see Chapter 4). The second finding that surprised me, given Orsi's work, was the level of male participation that I found in the devotional practices in San Pedro. While Orsi found women doing most of the praying in both of his major studies, I found a number of devout Italian Catholic men in San Pedro who exhibited high levels of participation in private and public devotional activities and who were quite articulate in describing their personal histories and practices related to the meaning of their faith (see Chapter 5).

My work is also influenced by Colleen McDannell's *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*,⁵⁶ which emphasizes the importance of the material dimensions of religious practice and a "view from the pew" rather than the bishop's desk. Additionally, I rely on the work of Thomas Tweed, especially *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*. Tweed's emphasis on the importance of space and place in his discussion of Diasporic religion and his theoretical construct of "translocative religion" are particularly germane.

⁵⁶ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

In the field of pastoral theology, Don Browning has called for careful descriptive work in practical theology.⁵⁷ My study supplements Elaine Ramshaw's general overview of the pastoral dimensions of religious rituals⁵⁸ by focusing the analysis of ritual in a particular historical and cultural context.

In my view, pastoral theology, or any theology, should not be separated from the historical and cultural contexts of its adherents. Sheila Davaney's "pragmatic historicism" makes a similar argument for interdisciplinary conversations in the field of theology. She writes, "The mode of theology under consideration here increasingly appears as a form of cultural analysis, critique, and reconstruction, and as such it seeks conversation with those disciplines and methodologies that will better equip theologians to enter the world of lived beliefs and practices."⁵⁹ While this study will engage in cultural analysis and critique more than reconstruct, I hope it will further equip theologians, pastors, and clinicians "to enter the world of lived beliefs and practices" with greater awareness and understanding of the range of meanings and functions that beliefs and practices may involve.

The academic field of pastoral care and counseling, which is more commonly referred to as "pastoral theology" in North American theological schools,⁶⁰ has been in

⁵⁷ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*.

⁵⁹ Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Mapping Theologies: An Historicist Guide to Contemporary Theology," in *Changing Conversations: Religious Reflection and Cultural Analysis*, eds. Dwight N. Hopkins and Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York: Routledge, 1996), 40.

⁶⁰ Bonnie Miller-McLemore and K. Samuel Lee, "Doctoral (Ph.D. And Th.D.) Studies in Religion and Personality or Pastoral Theology," Unpublished paper prepared for the Society for Pastoral Theology, 2000.

the midst of a shift in emphasis and identity for some years. Historian Brooks Holifield has admirably chronicled a thematic shift in pastoral care “from salvation to self-realization” over the course of three hundred years of American history. His study left off in the 1970s, just as the emphasis on the context of pastoral care was beginning to take shape.⁶¹ In subsequent years, pastoral theologians have gained an expanded awareness of the importance of the context of ministry, including such issues as social location, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation.⁶² Anton Boisen’s paradigm of the patient as the “living human document” has given way to Bonnie Miller-McLemore’s characterization of the “living human web” as the appropriate focus of pastoral care in complex social contexts.⁶³ No longer content with highly psychologized notions of self-actualization, and with highly individualized pastoral counseling as the chief form of care, the field has continued to move toward contextualization and communalization of care.⁶⁴ This study contributes to this shift by emphasizing socio-cultural and religious contexts as well as the psychological dynamics of religious devotion in a particular historical setting. In considering the devotions as a form of pastoral care, this study also

⁶¹ E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

⁶² Charles Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986); Gerkin, *An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997); Pamela D. Couture and Rodney J. Hunter, eds., *Pastoral Care and Social Conflict: Essays in Honor of Charles V. Gerkin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

⁶³ Anton Boisen, *Exploration of the Inner World* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1950); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century,” in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

⁶⁴ Kathleen J. Greider, Gloria A. Johnson, and Kristen J. Leslie, “Three Decades of Women Writing for Our Lives,” in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, eds. Bonnie Miller-McLemore and Brita Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

emphasizes the communal dimensions of the devotions, the ways in which large numbers of people give and receive care through these practices.

In my view, research in pastoral theology ought to become more quickly and more radically historicized. An example of what I consider a positive move towards this end is pastoral theologians' growing use of insight from the field of congregational studies, a sub-field in sociology of religion.⁶⁵ Congregational studies emphasizes careful attention to the contexts of the congregation, including the neighborhood and geographic location of the church, the income levels and ethnic and racial mix of the members, and gender and power dynamics within the institution. While my study is not strictly speaking a congregational one, it does rely on some of the insights and theory informing this approach. Finally, another indication of a growing interest in historical context is the recent establishment of a study group within the Society for Pastoral Theology focused on "Religious Practices and Commitment."⁶⁶

With this study, I am also seeking to contribute to the pastoral theology literature addressing Roman Catholic experience. The academic field of pastoral theology has been largely though not exclusively defined by Protestant scholars, Henri Nouwen being perhaps the most notable exception.⁶⁷ Regis Duffy's *A Roman Catholic Theology of*

⁶⁵ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, with Arthur E. Farnsley II, Tammy Adams et al., *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

⁶⁶ This Theological Study Group is currently chaired by Rodney Hunter and Brita Gill-Austern. See Rodney Hunter's letter included in the annual mailing to members of the Society for Pastoral Theology, 4 Dec. 1999, page 5.

⁶⁷ See Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971); *Intimacy: Essays in Pastoral Psychology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1969); *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in*

Pastoral Care, published in 1983, is written from the perspective of Catholic theology, but using what I would call a Protestant pastoral theological method.⁶⁸ Duffy focuses on post-Vatican II theology and pastoral care in the Catholic Church, and suggests that devotions are largely a thing of the past. He writes, "While this (devotional) dimension has not disappeared, it has sometimes taken on other expressions."⁶⁹ More recently, Roslyn A. Karaban has articulated a call for feminist pastoral theology that adequately incorporates the voices and the needs of Catholic laywomen. Karaban calls for social analysis and makes good use of a Roman Catholic liberation theology paradigm.⁷⁰ Marie McCarthy has also addressed Roman Catholic pastoral-theological perspectives.⁷¹ Additionally, Robert Wicks and his colleagues at Loyola College in Maryland have written considerable work out of a Catholic pastoral care and counseling context. In particular, Joseph Ciarrocchi and Robert Wicks have recently offered a book on pastoral psychotherapy with Catholic priests, committed Catholic religious, and Protestant

Contemporary Society (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972); *The Living Reminder: Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977); *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981); *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); and *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

⁶⁸ Regis A. Duffy, *A Roman Catholic Theology of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 112-13.

⁷⁰ See Karaban, "Work in Progress: Pastoral Counseling as an Emerging, Professional, Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 3 (1993):55-56; and "Always an Outsider? Feminist, Female, Lay, and Roman Catholic," in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, eds. Bonnie Miller-McLemore and Brita Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 65-76.

⁷¹ Marie McCarthy, "A Roman Catholic Perspective on Psychiatry and Religion," in *Religious and Ethical Factors in Psychiatric Practice*, eds. Don S. Browning, Thomas Jobe, and Ian S. Evison (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, in association with Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith and Ethics, 1990), 41-66.

clergy.⁷² In this study, the authors explicitly understand these professions as “cultural contexts.”⁷³ Additionally, Robert Wicks and Barry Estadt have edited a significant volume that addresses pastoral counseling in specific geographic and cultural contexts.⁷⁴

⁷² Joseph W. Ciarrocchi and Robert J. Wicks, *Psychotherapy with Priests, Protestant Clergy, and Catholic Religious: A Practical Guide* (Madison, Conn.: Psychosocial Press, 2000).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, xi-xiii.

⁷⁴ Robert J. Wicks and Barry K. Estadt, eds., *Pastoral Counseling in a Global Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).



Figure 1 - Surrounded by 30-foot marble pillars, Mary stands on a wave, cradling a purse seiner in her left arm. The piece, made of marble imported from Pietrosante, Italy, frames the central altar at Mary Star of the Sea Church in San Pedro, CA.



Figure 2 - Close-up of Mary Star of the Sea holding the tuna fishing vessel in her left arm.



Figure 3 – This large stained-glass window on the upper left side of the sanctuary depicts Jesus and the disciples in the gospel narrative of the abundant catch.



Figure 4 - The stilling of the storm. This stained-glass window is located opposite Figure 3, on the upper right side of the sanctuary.

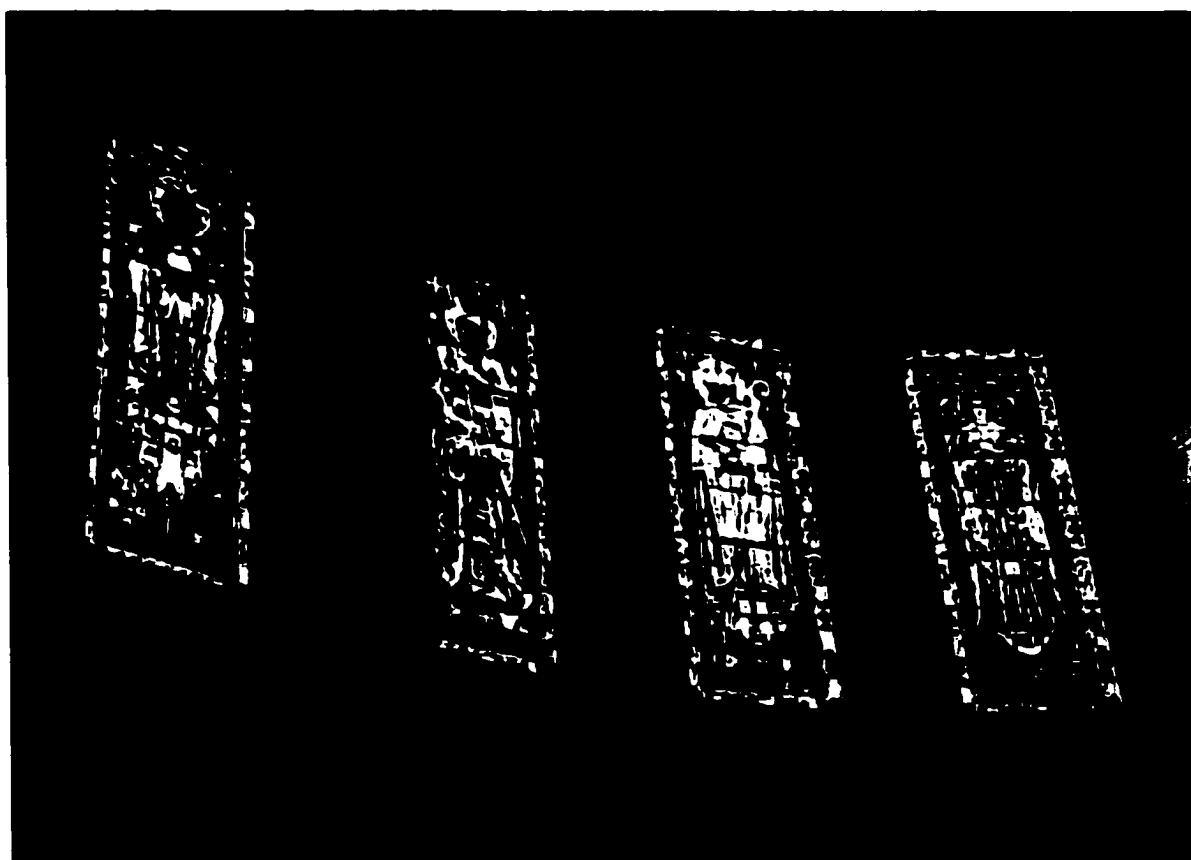


Figure 5 - Stained-glass representations of Saint Peter, Saint George, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, and Saint Gabriel. These four windows of a series of thirteen are located on the upper portion of the rotunda behind the main altar at Mary Star of the Sea.

CHAPTER 2

On Seeing and Being Seen

-- "*L'occhio sinistro della Madonna e vivo*"

Introduction

An ornately framed portrait of a Madonna called "Rosa Mistica" hangs on a dining room wall in the home of an immigrant couple from Sicily (Figure 6). The caption in the lower right hand corner of the portrait reads, "*L'occhio sinistro della Madonna e vivo*," the left eye of the Madonna is alive. My hostess, whom I shall call Maria, explains with great enthusiasm that there is a statue of Rosa Mistica, in a chapel back in Italy, that actually has one living eye that moves about: "Real, real." she says emphatically with her heavy accent.¹ For Maria, this portrait in its prominent location in her home suggests the presence of that statue in its home in Italy. Beyond this, the portrait invokes the presence of the real holy mother, the supernatural Madonna with her watchful, living gaze.

Most, if not all, of the devotional practices that I observed in San Pedro include a dimension of seeing and/or being seen by the holy. This visual practice is aided by numerous images of supernatural figures—whether it be Jesus peering down from a crucifix, a guardian angel hovering over an entryway, a statue or portrait of a Madonna, or a representation of one of a myriad of saints. Probably, though, it is Mary's gaze that is the most constant. At Mary Star of the Sea parish, a large bronze statue of Mary one hundred feet up in the air stares out over the church and the community toward the water

¹ Interview #18.

(Figure 7). I have been told that fishermen out at sea in the darkness of night spot this statue first as they approach San Pedro Bay. Looking up at Mary's crown of stars and outstretched arms, I imagine her welcoming so many immigrant fishermen ashore, a West Coast version of the Statue of Liberty.

The omnipresence of the Madonna, her loving gaze and care, are also visible at ground level. The outside wall of the church on the Seventh Street side is adorned by a large mosaic portrait of Mary with the caption, "*Maria Stella Maris, Ora Pro Nobis,*" "Mary Star of the Sea, Pray for Us" (Figure 8). The inside of the sanctuary is replete with images of Mary, including the central marble statue of Mary Star of the Sea holding the purse seiner (Figures 1 and 2), stained-glass window renditions of Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of Fatima, a large mosaic of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Figure 9), a marble statue of Mary embracing the crucified Jesus, recalling Michaelangelo's *Pieta* (Figure 10), and a well-tended altar to Our Mother of Perpetual Help (Figure 11).² In Mary Star's elementary school, adjacent to the sanctuary, classrooms may also host small shrines to Mary and the saints (Figure 12).

Similarly, in the homes I visited, images of Mary were everywhere. From large statues that dominated living rooms or bedrooms, to small holy cards held up by refrigerator magnets, some vision or version of the Madonna was present in almost every home.³ In some cases, she could be seen in every room, and in backyard shrines as well.

² In addition to the lit banks of electric candles before this image, and the ready supply of fresh flowers, there is a large book nearby in which the devout write their prayers of petition.

³ There were two exceptions, I believe. However, even in these cases, rosary beads featuring small sculpted images of Mary were still kept.

Portraits of Mary hanging in bedrooms often had been given as wedding gifts (Figure 13), while her statues had been passed down from parents or grandparents. One couple had a beautiful pencil drawing of Mary that the man himself had made, hanging in their bedroom (Figure 14). Pictures of deceased loved ones were commonly arranged near images of Mary, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or the saints on bedroom dressers or hallway tables (Figure 15 and Figure 16). Fresh or silk flowers, as well as candles or electric lamps, were often grouped together with the religious images in altar-like arrangements (Figure 17).

The visual images of Mary and the saints that adorn the homes, churches, and, in some cases, the bodies of the persons I interviewed in San Pedro, serve as more than mere background to the practice of religious devotion. Rather, the visual components of devotional practice are constitutive elements of it. This “visual piety,” to use David Morgan’s term,⁴ is a basic idiom of the embodied faith which is wittingly or unwittingly passed down to the younger generations in this setting. The habit of looking at visual representations of supernatural figures engenders certain psycho-spiritual capacities, expectations, and/or sensibilities in the viewer. The presence of religious images exerts a formational influence on children and grandchildren. David Morgan asserts,

Images serve as a material means of conducting the rituals that define the public, domestic, and private spheres in which believers discern their identity and the characteristic horizons of reality that link them to one another and gather their experience into coherent worlds.⁵

⁴ Morgan. *Visual Piety*.

⁵ Ibid., 18.

My research in San Pedro bears out a sense of this ritual function of visual representations of Mary and the saints. These images that are often both Catholic and Italian in origin and/or style function to shape the viewers' perceptions of the holy, the world, and themselves. The representations also link viewers to each other, through shared impressions, moods, and memories. Even when members of the younger generations question their elders' religious ideas and practices, they seem to maintain a capacity for visual piety, as well as an affection for the familiar sight of saints in their environments.

In this chapter, I will describe the prevalence of religious art and artifacts in this setting and their significance to the devout, their children, and grandchildren. I will also include several photographs of these items in order to convey to the reader a sense of their immediacy and visual impact.⁶ There are two preponderant themes in my research and interviews on this subject. The first is the general sense of divine or supernatural presence that the devout glean from religious art and artifacts. The second is the frequency with which these items are associated with memories of absent friends or family members, especially deceased loved ones, and with Italian homelands. After describing and illustrating these two general themes, I will move to a closer analysis of the visual practices of four individuals. Beginning with an immigrant's story and moving down through the generations, this section will illustrate the ways in which visual piety both changes and endures in this setting. In order to help unpack the psycho-logic of this

⁶ I also hope, by the use of photographs, to "reveal the story" to the reader in a different way. Margaret Miles writes, "We must find the methods and the materials that reveal the story of contemporary and historical persons who have not been recognized as participants in historical and theological work

visual practice and its pastoral value, I will cast this discussion in the light of D. W.

Winnicott's theoretical concept of the transitional realm.

The Transitional Realm

The transitional realm, as D. W. Winnicott describes it, originates in a baby's first dawning sense that he or she is not omnipotent—that is, fully in charge of his or her world. Specifically, the transitional realm refers to the baby's experience of the world, i.e., the breast, or the mother (or other primary care-giver) as separate, distinct, and not completely malleable. According to Winnicott, the child's inner psyche gradually comes to terms with this outside world, through "illusory" experience of it. This experience is illusory in the sense that it is based on the child's perception of the world (or mother) and shaped by the child's emotional need to feel that he or she can depend on that world (mother). This illusion is, in most cases, partly real. That is, the child can usually depend on the mother or other primary caregiver to meet at least some of his or her basic needs. In the intermediate or transitional realm, the child uses imagination to help make the caregiver—and thus the world—seem better, more dependable, pliant, or supple.

As the child grows, he or she continues to gain access to the transitional realm through playing. Playing is natural, it belongs to health.⁷ Winnicott writes, "There is a direct development from the transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to shared playing, and from this to cultural experiences."⁸ Winnicott links adult creativity

because they were not skilled language users." Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), xii.

⁷ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 41.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

and a sense of aliveness to the ability to experience through playing or formlessness a foray into the transitional realm. He writes, "We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals."⁹ According to Winnicott, it is through such experiences that a sense of self develops that is more than mere compliance.

Winnicott views religion and the arts as belonging to the transitional realm. These are arenas in which adults as well as children creatively negotiate the distances between inner and outer reality, and the paradoxical need for both separation from and union with others. Famously, he writes,

I am here staking a claim for the intermediate state between a baby's inability and his growing ability to recognize and accept reality. I am therefore studying the substance of *illusion*, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion, and yet becomes the hallmark of madness when an adult puts too powerful a claim on the credulity of others, forcing them to acknowledge a sharing of illusion that is not their own. We can share a respect for *illusory experience*, and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experiences. This is a natural root of grouping among human beings.¹⁰

As we begin this discussion of visual piety in San Pedro, it may be helpful to those readers whose religious illusory experiences are extremely dissimilar to the ones described here (i.e., non-Catholics), to think of these devotional practices as analogous to other transitional phenomena, such as music, meditation, or prayer.

⁹ Ibid.. 64.

¹⁰ Ibid.. 3.

Piety and Presence

The sense of the visual presence of the divine in everyday life is the first predominant theme I noted in my research on this subject. This feature of devotional life in San Pedro was underlined for me in the course of my frequent visits to the sanctuary of Mary Star of the Sea Church. Upon entering the building, I was often struck by the sheer multiplicity of visual images. Designed by architect George J. Adams and built in 1958, the space is chock full of altars and shrines and stained glass windows. This ornate sanctuary seems to have survived relatively unaltered by Catholic reform movements in the 1950s and 1960s that attempted to simplify and masculinize Catholic Church art and architecture.¹¹ Instead, we find here a multitude of saints, many with long, flowing hair, occupying private altars along the church walls, giving the place an old-world European feel. In fact, the marble used to build these structures was imported for this purpose from Pietrasante, Italy, and the most of the stained glass came from Dublin, Ireland.¹² The origins of these materials as well as the style and form of the representations serve as palpable reminders of the old country to some immigrants. To this visitor, the combined impact of the fifteen statues, two mosaics, and thirteen stained glass holy figures arrayed around the church is a sense of having company. Even if no one else is there, it is hard to feel alone in this space.

¹¹ McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 167-86.

¹² Monsignor George Scott, pastor of Mary Star from 1946-1975, who presided over the building of the sanctuary, is said to have gone to Italy himself to find the finest altar and religious works for "his church." Bobich and Palmer, 15.

Many people tell me that they like going to the church best when it is empty, when there is no Mass or organized devotion in progress. They speak of the peacefulness of it. They go to visit their favorite saints: Saint Anthony, Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Saint Joseph, Saint Anne (the mother of Mary), and Saint John-Joseph of the Cross are frequently mentioned as the Italians' favorites. On any given day, these saints' altars are aglow with the red lights of electric candle banks, and just as likely adorned with fresh flowers.

When I think about what these statues on their altars evoke for the devout, I keep coming back to the plain sense of the presence of the supernatural figures themselves. The oldest and most devout immigrants regularly dust these altars, wash the linens, bring fresh flowers, and buy tokens to light the electric candles. In short, the devout treat these spaces as though they are sacred spaces, inhabited by the saints themselves. The devout speak of going to see their saints' statues, whether at church or at home, as they do of going to visit with a friend or a family member. They talk to these figures candidly, "from the heart."¹³

Commonly, the persons I interviewed in San Pedro indicated that the visual representations of Mary or the saints gave them a feeling of calm and/or a sense of protection. While many of the persons I interviewed did not share with Maria (described above) a conscious conviction that the statue or picture was alive, they did indicate that the artwork instantly reminded them of the holy presence with them. One immigrant, in

¹³ See Taves, *Household of Faith*.

reference to the plethora of religious art in her home, said, "Wherever you turn, you see God." She added, "God is with me, on [at] my side."¹⁴

Psychologically and pastorally speaking, the devout's almost continual sense of the presence of the divine or of supernatural patron saints is no small matter. This sense of presence can function as a tremendous pastoral resource. In his essay, "The Capacity to Be Alone," Winnicott writes,

The basis of the capacity to be alone is the experience of being alone in the presence of someone. In this way, an infant with weak ego organization may be alone because of reliable ego support. . . . Gradually, the ego-supportive environment is introjected and built onto the individual's personality, so that there comes about a capacity actually to be alone.¹⁵

Winnicott was speaking of the child's developing capacity to be alone, which evolves when the child is left to himself or herself in the presence of the mother (or mother-figure). Winnicott views this experience as necessary for maturity to develop gradually. The actual presence of the mother or mother figure allows the child to begin safely to experience himself or herself as a separate being.

In the context of the devotions, especially in a church where one can experience a sense of being alone in the presence of so many life-sized replicas of the saints, it is not surprising that the devout claim to gain strength and a feeling of calm. The size of many of the statues particularly seems to impart a sense of their actual presence, and perhaps aids the identification or introjection process. If the imaginative presence of the saints with their calm and serene expressions is introjected, gradually built into the personalities

¹⁴ Interview #15.

¹⁵ Winnicott, *Maturation Processes*, 36.

of the devout, the devout may develop a greater capacity to feel safe and calm in the world. The comfort and security that the devout speak of may be derived from a sense that the saints are constantly with them, even if this embodied knowledge usually remains in the background of awareness. Since this potentially ego-supportive environment is readily accessed through a glance at a portrait or a visit to the church, the feeling of strength and calm is regularly reinforced. Given the religious import and authority of the saints in this setting, a sense of spiritual well-being is likely to be added to the emotional calm that this visual piety imparts. All in all, the practice of venerating the saints through their visual representations can potentially yield considerable psycho-spiritual strength to the devout.

The common practice of hanging a crucifix or an angel in children's bedrooms attests to the feeling of protection that many of the devout experience in the presence of these religious objects. One well-educated third-generation woman, trained in science, said, "I wouldn't feel right about putting my babies in a room without a crucifix."¹⁶ Crucifixes and saints also often hang on the inside walls of fishing vessels.¹⁷ One interviewee told the story of a captain grabbing the crucifix off the wall of the ship's cabin in a storm, going up on deck and holding the crucifix high in the air, only to find his boat mysteriously released from a swirling vacuum current.¹⁸ Holy cards with pictures of Mary or the Saints were also commonly taken to war with soldiers. One man told me that

¹⁶ Interview #21.

¹⁷ One fisherman told me in passing that Portuguese fishing vessels typically have a chapel--an entire room full of holy images.

¹⁸ Interviewee #15.

when he was afraid of dying in World War II, he took a holy card out of his wallet and promised the saint he would name his firstborn after her if she would get him home alive. His daughter now bears the saint's name.¹⁹ These stories illustrate the supernatural power that some of the devout attribute to the objects themselves, as well as to the saints they represent.

This is not to claim, of course, that the sense of supernatural presence mediated through religious artifacts always amounts to a feeling of comfort or protection for the devout. Certainly other emotions, such as guilt, have been described. One male immigrant I interviewed, a self-described atheist who still claims to be Catholic "in the heart," is frankly resentful of the devotions that so preoccupy his mother. He believes that his mother, who is quite devout, is deeply deluded. Referring to her practice of devotions during Lent and Holy Week, when she weeps as she imaginatively identifies with the pain and suffering of Jesus, he said: "She never cried when my father died, but every Easter she cry [*sic*] like crazy."²⁰ The intensity with which the man speaks seems to indicate that he is angry about this, and perhaps hurt or jealous of the love that his mother reserves for supernatural beings, which, he implies, is at the expense of human ones.

Nor is the spiritual or pastoral value of looking at these artifacts unanimously agreed upon among the devout themselves. Some persons interviewed find the side altars a bit superfluous--a distraction from devotion to God alone. Some feel that paying

¹⁹ Interview #23. The name is withheld to protect the anonymity of the family.

²⁰ Interview #14.

homage to the statues is embarrassing or superstitious. When asked about the meaning of religious art or artifacts, several persons made comments decrying superstition, such as, "I'm not worshipping the statue,"²¹ or "You don't really need the beads to pray when you're mature."²² One man said, "It's just the idea of focusing on something. . . . I fix my eyes on the image of Mary. It helps you fix your thoughts."²³

It seems to me that these individuals were keenly aware that their practices have been characterized as childish or superstitious by many contemporary Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The interviewees took pains to distinguish themselves from this stereotype. They wanted me to know that they were not simplistic in the ways that they thought about these images. One second-generation woman showed me several pictures of her favorite saints and said,

The saints are people that have lived, and you feel that they can help you by being an example. They help me live a better life. . . . They did extraordinary things. We pray to them and honor them. . . . Maybe it's only that we think it works and so it does. Whether it works or not it's your faith. It's nice to raise your child with security.²⁴

These comments convey a certain self-consciousness about religious practices that are no longer mainstream, even for Catholics. The comments also indicate the woman's recognition of the illusory or possibly illusory quality of religion. In spite of this, the woman asserts that these images work for her, and she is profoundly invested in them.

²¹ Interview #5.

²² Interview #19.

²³ Interview #5.

²⁴ Interview #24.

In all of the homes I visited, with one exception,²⁵ I saw some religious images displayed. These usually included at least one Madonna. Even the three women who described themselves respectively as “a fallen-away Catholic,” “a non-practicing Catholic,” and “converted to Christ alone,” all had some religious artifacts in their homes: two carried rosaries in their purses. The presence of these items seemed important to them. The self-described “fallen-away” Catholic who “married outside the church” has little altars and statues in several rooms. She credits one of these statues, a sculpted group of the Holy Family, with helping her conceive her children. Even in these cases where the women had mixed and/or hard feelings toward the Catholic Church, they appeared to be comfortable with and fond of their images of Mary, the angels, or saints.

One of these women said she had always liked Mary Star’s pieta-like statue of Mary with Jesus (Figure 10). Though she no longer attends Mass, she remembers this statue fondly for its artistic value. “I’m a visual person,” she claims. “I loved that statue. I appreciated the artistry in it.”²⁶ The woman noted that she associates her appreciation of art and her interest in her own artistic expression with her experience of viewing that statue. The statue happened to be located directly in her line of vision from the pew in which she and her family always sat. This last case brings to mind Margaret Miles’ claim that “Images are powerful, and the most powerful images accomplish with skill and economy that which they do best: formation by attraction.”²⁷ While the (third generation)

²⁵ In the home that was the exception, my visit was confined to the living room, so I am not entirely sure that there were no religious items displayed in other rooms.

²⁶ Interview #21.

²⁷ Miles, *Image and Insight*, 145.

woman in this case does not accept official church doctrine regarding Mary, especially that of the virgin birth, the woman nevertheless acknowledges that she was formed to some degree, or at least her artistic sensibilities were shaped, by her attraction to that statue. Interestingly Sarah, another third-generation woman whose story I explore below, also singles out this particular statue. Sarah associates the piece with her own capacity for compassion, her ability to be moved by human suffering. Thus, a feeling for particular religious images or objects remains with these third-generation women even when traditional theological meanings or practices such as attendance at Mass are abandoned.

Most of the people I interviewed and observed seemed to treat religious statues or pictures with respect, if not affection. The visual representations are treated as items of value. When a religious society at Mary Star holds a fundraising raffle, at least one of the major prizes being raffled will be a statue of a saint or a Madonna. At the events I attended, social pressure notwithstanding, the winners of these items have usually appeared to me to be genuinely pleased. Along with their religious meaning, these statues hold some social capital within the Italian-speaking community. They seem to signify a common religious and ethnic heritage, reminiscent of parents and grandparents. This religious heritage is generally respected, even by those in the younger generations who do not practice devotional piety in the same way or with as much frequency and consistency as their parents or grandparents did.

This respect for religious images and Italian heritage strikes me as analogous to the respect that is commonly accorded to parents and grandparents themselves. This points to the second predominant theme that I noted in relation to visual piety in this setting. The visual elements of the devotions, in the home as well as in church, were often associated with deceased loved ones and their Italian homelands. It is to this association between family, homelands, and saints in the practice of visual piety that I will now turn.

Family, Homelands, and Saints

Along with a sense of divine or supernatural presence, my research in San Pedro confirms the close association between the devout's love of their saints, their deceased family members, and their homelands. This connection is clear in the Mary Star sanctuary, where many of the statues have been purchased or dedicated in memory of deceased loved ones. Both the family's natal land—in this case, Italy—and the actual deceased family members are memorialized in these images and artifacts. In some cases, the statues themselves or the materials from which they were carved were imported from Italy. I have been told, for example, that you can tell whether a statue of Saint Joseph was made in Italy by looking at the length of the saint's hair. Statues depicting him with long hair, like the one in the Mary Star sanctuary, are almost certainly of Italian origin. The presence of these patron saints of particular regions, such as Saint Joseph, patron of Sicily and Saint John-Joseph of the Cross, patron of the Island of Ischia (Figure 18) further emphasize the Italian origin of the devotions. When the devout "purchase" a perpetually

lit candle for one of the saints' altars at church, the name of a deceased relative is actually printed on the candle, adding another visual and material reminder of connections between the saints and the deceased loved one. Both the natal land and the loved ones from the family of origin are memorialized in these altars and artifacts.

Thomas Tweed, in his book *Our Lady of The Exile*, focuses attention on the significance of place in religious experience.²⁸ Modifying the theoretical categories of Jonathan Z. Smith,²⁹ Tweed speaks of "translocative religion," which he describes as "the tendency among many first and second-generation migrants to symbolically move between the homeland and the new land."³⁰ According to Tweed, religious artifacts have a particular significance for persons experiencing a sense of dislocation, in that artifacts have the ability to transport people emotionally to the imagined homeland.³¹ Immigrants' affection for their natal land, their "geopiety,"³² in combination with their love for family members left behind or deceased, adds layers of feeling to devotional objects and practices. Artifacts, because they occupy space, can also be a means through which displaced persons and groups form emotional attachments to a new place, such as an altar or a church or a home. In doing this they are, according to Tweed, engaging in the

²⁸ Tweed. *Our Lady of the Exile*. 91-98.

²⁹ Smith speaks of "locative" meaning local or native religion and "utopian" referring to dislocated or Diasporic religion. Tweed modifies these categories and adds one, which he terms "translocative" religion. Translocative emphasizes a sense of "moving across" space and time, a going back and forth in religious cartography. Jonathan Z. Smith. *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). 121-142; Tweed. *Our Lady of the Exile*. 93.

³⁰ Tweed. *Our Lady of the Exile*. 95.

³¹ *Ibid.*. 97.

³² *Ibid.*. 87.

ongoing cultural work of “constructing a symbolic dwelling in which they might have their own space and find their own place.”³³

The persons I interviewed in San Pedro consistently displayed portraits or statues of the Italian patron saints along with more universal figures (such as the Sacred Heart) together with portraits of parents, grandparents, or other family members. Many times I saw rosary beads draped over a picture of a beloved mother (Figure 19). The religious quality of these groupings was enhanced by the presence of dresser scarves that resemble altar cloths, small lamps or perpetual candles burning in front of the images, as well as fresh or silk flowers. These altars often incorporated the most precious persons and symbols in the person’s life, placed alongside of personal items such as medications or hairbrushes (Figure 20). Sometimes a small American flag and/or some record of military service accompanied the arrangement, suggesting an attachment to or sacralization of the new land.³⁴

In some homes, these diverse items suggesting the love of family, land, and saints are found grouped together on a devout’s bedroom dresser, in front of a mirror (Figure 21 and Figure 22). As a result, the devout will regularly see these images together with his or her own image when looking into the mirror. This visual experience probably informs or shapes the person’s sense of self and his or her relationship to the external world. Winnicott’s theory of the transitional realm and the creative tension between union and

³³ Ibid., 93.

³⁴ The tendency to sacralize the new land is also a feature of translocative religion, according to Tweed, as displaced peoples attempt to “map, construct, and inhabit worlds of meaning.” Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile*, 93.

separateness come to mind here. I imagine that there must be something comforting for the devout in seeing himself or herself in the mirror in close proximity to these pictures of loved ones and saints.³⁵ The impact of this visual experience could be significant, given that the devout is likely to have this experience of glancing in the mirror (that is also a shrine) at least twice a day, in the morning upon waking up, and at night before going to bed.³⁶

Ann Taves, in her book describing mid-nineteenth-century devotions in America, claims that the bourgeois family or household became a metaphor for the relationships between Catholics and the inhabitants of the supernatural world.³⁷ This metaphor, encouraged by missionary preachers and popular devotional manuals, emphasized the nearness of the spiritual world, and fostered feelings of affection toward supernatural relatives.³⁸ I found that many of the devout I interviewed in San Pedro tend to think of the saints in a similar way, as something like supernatural relatives. Certainly, Catholics in this setting are still taught to regard Mary as their Blessed Mother. They also tend to think of their deceased relatives as saints, or as being close to God, by virtue of the deceased's earthly religious devotion and/or current residence in heaven. A sense of connection to dead relatives is kept vital through the practice of devotion to the saints.

³⁵ Winnicott's theories of mirroring will be discussed below.

³⁶ David Morgan, in his discussion of religious images in bedrooms, speaks of the capacity of bedroom images to "measure and mark off a regular rhythm of daily life, and thereby to help insure a stable structure for the home and family. The bedroom is, after all, the place in the home where the diurnal cadence of dark and light is experienced." Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 160.

³⁷ Taves, *Household of Faith*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 47-69.

This is particularly evident in home altars where holy cards and family photographs abide together, and are seen together with every glance at a bedside table.

Almost everyone I interviewed affirmed that their statues and pictures reminded them of their families, and especially of deceased family members. “My mother’s house looked like a shrine.”³⁹ one man noted. His devotion to Mary seemed closely tied to his love for his now deceased mother. The fact that the saints’ portraits or statues that people display in their homes are themselves often gifts from family members, or inheritances passed down from parents, enhances the emotional link between loved ones and the statues as well as the saints they represent. A young woman I interviewed, a member of the third generation, had a shelf in her living room home entertainment center devoted to deceased relatives. Though she had no saints displayed with them, she told me that these loved ones “were” their family saints.⁴⁰

A second-generation woman told me of her loss of two infant siblings, one death due to the Spanish flu and one to pneumonia. She began to think of the lost siblings as angels, living in heaven with God. When she had children of her own, she hung pictures of angels in their bedrooms. She told her children that they had two guardian angels, who would always be at their side.⁴¹ In this case, the deceased infants actually became the referents of the angel portraits.

³⁹ Interview #5.

⁴⁰ Interview #25.

⁴¹ Interview #24.

Some individuals had intentionally constructed altars in their homes in memory of deceased loved ones. One woman, the “fallen away Catholic,” whose sister had recently passed away, created an impromptu altar on her kitchen counter (Figure 23). On this altar is a statue of Saint Teresa, the patron saint of Verona, the northern Italian family homeland. Along with Saint Teresa is a picture of the deceased sister, and a picture album that highlights the last year of her life as she struggled with cancer. Fresh flowers attended the memorial.

Another woman marked her mother’s death by starting a tradition of building an elaborate shrine to Saint Joseph in her living room for ten days each March, in celebration of the Saint’s feast day and the traditional period of celebration that lasts from one to two weeks (see Chapter 4). This annual creation takes over the mantle above the fireplace. Indeed, it dominates the whole room both with the bright colors of flowing fabric and the fragrance of flowers. The woman told me that she established this practice because she and her daughter felt that something “was missing” after her mother, a devout and immigrant matriarch, passed away. The function of the altar seems to be to honor the deceased mother at least as much as Saint Joseph.

David Morgan, summarizing his discussion of Protestants’ practice of hanging Warner Sallman’s *Head of Christ* portraits in their homes, makes claims about the importance of visual piety in the process of the construction of the self and its habitat. Morgan writes,

The theory of popular religious visual culture advanced here posits that by becoming constant and virtually transparent features of daily experience,

embedded in the quotidian rituals, narratives, and collective memories that people take for granted, religious images help form the half-forgotten texture of everyday life. As a part of the very fabric of consciousness, religious images participate fundamentally in the social construction of reality. . . . Again and again we have found that religious images assist in fashioning the impression of a coherent, enduring, and uniform world in which the self exists meaningfully.⁴²

Something similar can be said about Italian Catholic visual piety in San Pedro. A “constant and virtually transparent” feature of immigrants’ lives, it signifies both particular and collective memories—memories of family and friends, memories of homes and churches left behind in Italy. These memories are constantly renewed through the presence of artwork that is both Italian and Catholic. Since this artwork surrounds people not only in church but also in the psychologically privileged space of the home, it becomes a part of the “half-forgotten quality of the fabric of everyday life” of which Morgan speaks.

I asked members of the younger immigrant generations how they felt about religious pictures in their homes or their grandparents’ homes when they were growing up. They responded with comments such as, “I didn’t think about it. It’s just how it was.” Or, “All my friends’ houses looked just like ours. I didn’t know anyone who didn’t have them.” A young second-generation woman said, “They were just always there, part of my life. I felt protected, secure, if anyone tried to break in.”⁴³ A third-generation woman stated, “They were just a part of who we were and what we

⁴² Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 207.

⁴³ Interview #22.

believed.”⁴⁴ One third-generation woman said that they were “visual aids to remind us where we came from.”⁴⁵ These comments suggest that the religious images were in fact so common that they appeared natural. They were unquestioned. A young two-thirds-generation woman said, “I just knew that we’re Catholic and that’s what Catholics do. When I started baby-sitting the neighbors’ children, I first saw non-Catholic homes.”⁴⁶

Here the power of the shared habitual experience of looking at religious art and artifacts comes into fuller view. The artwork itself, along with the meanings that are assigned to it by parents, grandparents, church teaching, and circles of Italian Catholic friends and neighbors, has helped to constitute and preserve a traditional way of life. But this is not a static process, and as the next section will show, the devout hold onto, let go and find themselves still held by their visual piety in interesting and innovative ways.

A Closer Look

Maria

What happens exactly to the devout when they gaze into the face of Mary or one of the other saints? Of course, the devout do not actually look into the face of Mary, but into a portrait or sculpture of her face. Those whom I interviewed are, to varying degrees, aware of this distinction. Yet two immigrant women whom I interviewed, Maria and Josephine, described a kind of blurring between their experience of the representation of the saint—the painting or the statue—and the actual saint—the supernatural being whom

⁴⁴ Interview #27.

⁴⁵ Interview #13.

⁴⁶ Interview #20. By two-thirds-generation, I mean to indicate that one parent was an immigrant and one was a member of the second generation.

they venerate. This blurring of boundaries is exemplified in Maria's description of the *Rosa Mistica* portrait, noted in the introduction to this chapter. The border between Maria's visual perception of the physical portrait of the Madonna and Maria's spiritual and emotional experience of the presence of the Madonna in the room is permeable, to say the least. In looking at the portrait in her living room (Figure 6), Maria imaginatively perceives the Madonna as present in the room ("real, real") and looking back, seeing Maria.

A general way of understanding what is happening psychologically for Maria, and for other persons who interact with religious art and objects, is through the lens of D.W. Winnicott's transitional realm. In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott describes this as "an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute."⁴⁷ Though Winnicott based these claims on the study of infants, he indicated that the need for illusion or play, some means of accessing the intermediate state, or the transitional realm, is lifelong. He claimed that playing or illusory experience is necessary for creative adult life, and that illusion is inherent in art and religion.

It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience . . . which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.). This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

I take this passage to refer to the difficulty or strain which is inherent in adult living: including not only the strains of love and work, and/or the hardship of illness or want, but also the difficulty of coming to terms with the precarious nature of life and all of the dimensions of external reality that human beings cannot control. The “intermediate area” of experience found in religion or art, or some combination of the two—as in the case of visual piety—can function in such a way as to grant respite from this strain. The sense of formlessness and/or beauty available in or through these intermediate experiences can refresh or regenerate the sense of self, and the capacity to creatively engage life.

In a general way, we can view Maria’s experience of the presence of the Madonna in the portrait in her living room as her experience of the transitional realm. The portrait of Mary, with her ambiguous left eye, serves the function of easing the strain of relating inner and outer reality for Maria. The illusion of the Madonna—the Holy Mother—as present and alive in the living room, looking at or watching over Maria, has probably helped Maria find relief from the strain of accepting the realities of dislocation and difficulty in her life circumstances. Maria left her natural mother behind in Sicily when she immigrated to this country at age thirty-nine. She now makes a practice of returning to her homeland for three months each year, in order to care for her mother (taking turns with her siblings in this care). Maria’s experience of Rosa Mistica’s presence may help ease the pain of the separation from her mother, her natal land, and all that was familiar to

her in Sicily. Additionally, Maria's devotion to Rosa Mistica could also be functioning to alleviate the guilt she may feel for leaving her mother.⁴⁹

In Maria's case, the strain of immigration was compounded by the difficulty of raising two sons alone while her husband, a fisherman, was away at sea for months at a time. Maria's capacity to see and feel the Madonna's presence during her husband's absence was probably an aid to her well-being, her sense of self, and her ability to construct a sense of her place in the world. Because the portrait of Rosa Mistica recalls a statue in a chapel in Italy, it may also function as a bridge or a "transitional object,"⁵⁰ through which Maria can experience her ties both to her homeland and to her current home—especially her domestic space—in this land. Maria's portrait of Rosa Mistica has probably been functioning in multiple ways for her, bridging distances in time and space, while providing a sense of the (Italian) Holy Mother's continual presence and watchful care.

Maria's relationship to the portrait of the Madonna may also be viewed in terms of a more specific phenomenon that Winnicott and other object relations theorists describe, psychological mirroring. The important detail to consider here is Maria's claim that the portrait looks back at her. Maria not only sees the Madonna as mother in the portrait, she also experiences a strong sense of being seen by her.

⁴⁹ Robert Orsi posits a similar thesis about the role of guilt toward the mother in his study of Italian devotion to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*, 163-68.

⁵⁰ Winnicott used this term to designate a child's first possession, an object that is not part of the child's body, but that is also not fully recognized as outside of the child's control. See "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," in Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 1-29. I am using the term in its

The psychological significance of this point is hard to overestimate. The importance of a loving maternal gaze to a child's well-being is well noted in psychological literature.⁵¹ Winnicott puts it succinctly when he says, "When I look I am seen, so I exist."⁵² But according to these theorists, the need to be seen is rarely fully met in childhood. Winnicott claims that the continual striving to get oneself seen or recognized is a characteristic of normal human existence; it is only exaggerated in certain clinical cases.⁵³ When Maria experiences herself as seen by the Madonna's watchful left eye, she may indeed be shoring up her sense of own existence, addressing this ongoing psychological task. When we consider Maria's somewhat marginalized social status in this country, as an older immigrant woman who speaks little English, the opportunity to feel and be seen becomes more critical.

Part of what the child needs to see in the "mirror" is a reflection of himself or herself in the parent's eyes. According to the theory of Heinz Kohut, three conditions can enhance the mirroring experience that is needed for healthy development in the early stages of life. One of these three positive conditions occurs when the primary care-givers

more general and popular meaning, to signify an object which provides a sense of comfort and connection in the context of separation from the mother or other primary object.

⁵¹ Mary D. Salter Ainsworth, "The Development of Infant-Mother Attachment," in *Review of Child Development Research*, ed. Bettye Caldwell and Henry N. Ricciuti, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 16-19; Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 354-56.

⁵² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 114.

⁵³ "What is illustrated by this case only exaggerates what is normal. The exaggeration is of the task of getting the mirror to notice and approve." Ibid. Heinz Kohut concurs: "We need mirroring acceptance, the merger with ideals, the sustaining presence of others like us, throughout our lives." Heinz Kohut, "Summarizing Reflections," in *Advances in Self Psychology*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (New York: International Universities Press, 1980), 494-95, cited in Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 370.

or “self-objects,” as Kohut calls them, “in their openness and similarity to the child, evoke a sense of essential likeness between the child and themselves.”⁵⁴ Here we might think about the significance of Rosa Mistica’s Italian origins. When Maria looks into the portrait, she may experience herself being seen or reflected back in the eyes of an Italian holy mother, that is, one with whom she probably feels a “sense of essential likeness.” The Rosa Mistica portrait as such may serve to mirror and reinforce Maria’s sense of herself as Italian, as female, and/or as a mother.

Maria’s religious devotion to the Madonna is also mirrored and reflected in her circle of Italian-speaking women friends at Mary Star of the Sea Church. Maria’s close-knit group of friends share similar immigration stories as well as devotional practices. Thomas Tweed notes that “translocative ritual behavior draws the displaced together,” especially through “unifying mythic figures”⁵⁵ such as the Madonna. Maria’s religious devotion provides her with considerable social support and spiritual connection to others.

Maria’s intense devotion, and the spiritual aura that surrounds her, enables her to be seen in another significant way. Within her circle of Italian and Sicilian Catholic women, Maria’s spiritual virtuosity is apparently recognized. She reads the Bible in Italian every day and feels that God is communicating with her: “I learn the book, and I feel when I read. I *feel* it. Thank God I have a light. I feel communication with God.” When Maria and her friends gather to pray, she often takes on the role of interpreter. “I

⁵⁴ Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and Beyond* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 159, paraphrasing Heinz Kohut and Ernest Wolf, “The Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment: An Outline,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 59 (1978): 413-25.

⁵⁵ Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile*, 97.

explain it [the Bible] to them. God use [*sic*] me. I read the gospel and God use [*sic*] me. We [I] proclaim the words of God.”⁵⁶ Maria indicates that her friends recognize her leadership and ask her to perform this interpretive role. Thus, both at home and within her social circle at the church, Maria experiences herself as seen and affirmed. Her sense of her own existence, her “translocative” religious experience, and her sense of being special and unique are mirrored and undergirded through her piety.

Josephine

Another woman, whom I shall call Josephine, gives quite specific information about what she sees when she gazes into the Madonna’s face. Josephine is also an immigrant, but would be more accurately described as a member of the one and half generation, given that her parents brought her to this country when she was only two years old. She is now a high-school teacher, age forty-three, the first one in her family to go to college. Josephine is married to a man she met in Sicily, and the couple has two teenage children.

In their beautiful Palos Verdes home, there are several impressive religious works of art, including a large ornately framed painting of the Madonna Del Ponte (Our Lady of the Bridge, patron Saint of Trapani, Sicily) that dominates the formal living room (Figure 24). Notably, a white marble statue of Our Lady of Fatima resides in a bay window in Josephine’s bedroom (Figure 25). Josephine regularly goes to this statue to pray. She says that if something is bothering her, she finds both repose and guidance from the

⁵⁶ Interview #18.

Madonna. When Josephine is trying to work out a problem in her life, she goes to look at Mary's face. She says of this practice:

This may sound crazy, but when I look at the Blessed Mother, if she's smiling, then I know everything's going to be okay. I feel that if I can go in my bedroom, and take a look at that Blessed Mother, if she's smiling, then we're okay. If she's not smiling, then I'm going, 'Whoa! . . . not a good sign.' Call it superstitious or whatever.⁵⁷

When I queried Josephine specifically about how the statue smiled, she said, "I feel that she's smiling. Because the statue's not going to change. But yet, my perception is, if I can look at that statue, and if I feel she's got that smile on her face, then I'm comforted by knowing everything's going to be okay."⁵⁸

Josephine seems to know that her prayers to the Madonna take her into a different kind of perceptual realm. She implies that there is a certain ambiguity in her awareness when she says, "My perception is, that she's smiling . . . the statue's not going to change." Nevertheless, for Josephine, the statue mediates a relationship with the real Madonna, a supernatural mother for whom Josephine feels great affection, respect, and awe.

According to Winnicott, when a baby looks into the face of his or her mother, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself.⁵⁹ That is, the baby picks up something in the mother's face that is related to what she sees, or how she feels about what she sees in the baby. The mother functions, in this way, as a mirror for the baby. If the mother—or other caregiver—reflects a harsh or angry mood to the baby, the baby will

⁵⁷ Interview #16.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 112.

take this in. If the mother's face signals approval, warmth, or pleasure in the sight of her child, the child will take this in.

Josephine's comments suggest that her devotion to the Blessed Mother functions to provide her with a kind of spiritual mirror that helps her gauge her comfort level with the vicissitudes of her daily life. Because the actual face of the statue of the Madonna is serene, Josephine's visual practice is apt to reinforce the internal strength that Josephine probably gleaned from her own mother and other childhood caretakers. This prior experience may be what enables Josephine to perceive that the Madonna is smiling at her.

The comfort of perceiving the Madonna's smile is no small thing. It has assisted Josephine through several crises in her life, including two fairly extensive bouts with cancer. "I look to her for *strength*," Josephine says emphatically, and I believe her. Josephine speaks with the authority of one who has survived the fearful struggle with life-threatening illness. She seems to know in her being that her devotion to Mary lends her a crucial sense of strength.

As noted above, Heinz Kohut describes three kinds of mirroring experiences that are needed in an environment that is conducive to the development of a healthy self.⁶⁰ Along with a sense of "essential likeness," the child also needs to experience caregivers who "respond to and confirm the child's innate sense of vigor, greatness, and perfection."⁶¹ These are caregivers who look with pleasure and approval on the child,

⁶⁰ Mitchell and Black, *Freud and Beyond*, 159.

⁶¹ Kohut and Wolf, "Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment," cited in Mitchell and Black, 159.

encouraging his or her “expansive states of mind.”⁶² Additionally, the child needs to be involved with powerful others “to whom the child can look up and with whom he can merge as an image of calmness, infallibility, and omnipotence.”⁶³ Images of these caregivers or “self-objects” are then established internally, contributing to the child’s developing sense of himself or herself.

While the saints are not actual childhood caregivers, it is important to recognize that the devout and some other Catholics are accustomed to experiencing Mary, the angels, and/or the saints as spiritual caretakers. Because the devout have grown up seeing and hearing about the saints, these figures are likely to be at least somewhat merged, experientially, with the child’s idealized parental introjects.⁶⁴ Visual representations of the saints, with their ethereal expressions, halos, and symbolic garb, are well equipped to mirror a sense of vigor, greatness, and perfection, both to children and adults.

Josephine reports finding strength, calmness, and vigor through looking into the face of Mary. She notes also a sense of essential likeness with Mary—the fact that she is female, and that she is a mother. While Our Lady of Fatima is traditionally considered a patroness of Spain, rather than Italy, the statue does have long dark hair, and Josephine

⁶² Mitchell and Black, 159.

⁶³ Kohut and Wolf, cited in Mitchell and Black, 159.

⁶⁴ Ann Taves, in her discussion of Roman Catholic devotions in mid-nineteenth century America, explores the significance of the popular use of parental metaphors in reference to Mary and the saints. Following Melford Spiro, she suggests the possibility that the power of cultural images of supernatural beings, such as Mary and the saints, may rest in part on the blurring of the line between children’s experiences of their natural and supernatural parents. The child’s idealized images of parental figures may merge with cultural images of the saints. This would help to explain the strength of the adult’s faith in the supernatural world. Taves, *Household of Faith*, 83. This theory might help us understand what is going on in this setting, especially among immigrants who imbibed the stories of the saints at their mother’s knee.

seems to have no difficulty in identifying with “her.” Josephine speaks of her statue as simply “*the*” Madonna, to whom she looks for strength. Josephine says of the Madonna, “She saw her son crucified. But she is not sorrowful or melancholy.” Josephine’s Madonna does seem to have a smiling face. This has mirrored back to Josephine a sense of happiness that undergirded her during her struggles with her health. Josephine elaborates, “I have a positive aspect on life. I’ve learned not to hold grudges. Happiness, health, and faith, it’s almost like the Trinity. You have to have all three.” Josephine’s thoughtful theological construction arises from her experience of illness and survival. She says of her cancer, “It made me a better person. My faith was able to get me through it. It’s a positive thing that happened. It puts things back into perspective. You realize that affluence is not the most important thing.”⁶⁵

Josephine’s story suggests that images of Mary and the visual piety that they inspire may be experienced as a form of pastoral care. Josephine uses her Madonna in ways that she has found both sustaining and curative. Additionally, Josephine reflects on her theology, actions, and values, “checking in” with her image of the Madonna for guidance and wisdom. Maria, Josephine, and, I suspect, many of the other devout women in this setting derive benefits from the psychological mirroring that they experience in relation to representations of the Madonna. Mary’s calm expression, almost universally depicted, combined with the emotional weight of her close association with earthly mothers and birthplaces and the spiritual weight that the Catholic church grants her,

⁶⁵ Interview #16.

constitute a compelling symbolic presence. The diversity of Madonnas—the variety of ethnic and cultural and regional versions of her—even within this limited setting, lends a certain malleability to Mary's images, allowing for specific kinds "essential likeness" to be experienced in the "mirror." Many first and second generation Italian women, in particular, rely on their visual representations of the Madonna, and find in these artistic creations, images of their own emotional, physical, and spiritual strength.⁶⁶

Sarah

Two stories from interviews with members of the third and fourth generations, respectively, also demonstrate the significance of religious seeing and being seen. Sarah, a member of the third generation, is thirty-five years old. She lives alone in an apartment not far from her parents' home in an older section of San Pedro. Several other members of her extended family live in the neighborhood. Sarah tells me that she does consider herself a Catholic, but not in the traditional sense. The child of an extremely religious mother and a father who is somewhat less devout, she no longer attends Mass. Her spirituality now centers around meditation, massage, prayer to God, and faith in guardian

⁶⁶ I am aware that this is a controversial claim. For a survey of theological critiques of the image of Mary, see Maurice Hamington, *Hail Mary? The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism* (New York: Routledge, 1995). For a critique of the cult of Mary in Italian popular Catholicism, see Michael P. Carroll, *Madonnas That Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Also see Clarissa Atkinson, Constance Buchanan, and Margaret Miles, eds., *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979). For theological attempts to rehabilitate the Marian image, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 150-53; Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987); Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Mary and the Female Face of God," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 500-26.

angels. Sarah has several religious objects around her house, some of which she collected for me to photograph. They include four images of angels, a Native American dream-catcher, a scapular from her mother, and a portrait of Saint Michael (Figure 26).

Sarah grew up with religious art and artifacts. In her home, the most prominent religious object was a statue of a patron saint in a backyard archway, which Sarah refers to as the garden saint. She also remembers the importance of rosary beads and the family Bible, from which each of the seven children in the family received a name. Sarah also recalls the Pieta-like marble structure of Mary and Jesus in the sanctuary of Mary Star of the Sea (Figure 10). She claims that it made an impression on her. "It had a strange effect. It looked larger than life. It moved me almost to tears, just looking at it."⁶⁷

Sarah's form of piety seems, at first, quite different from that of Maria and Josephine. The first two women attend Mass regularly and participate actively in the life of the congregation as well as in devotional societies. Sarah, by contrast, stopped attending Mass when she was a teenager, put off by what she perceived as the church's constant concern with fundraising. She also stated that she was never really comfortable at Mary Star, except when she was there alone. Again, Winnicott's insights about the importance of being alone in the presence of the mother come to mind. While Sarah, for various reasons, does not participate in the traditional ways, she retains the habit of looking at religious objects and relies emotionally and spiritually on her sense of divine or divine-like beings watching over her. Interestingly, when she describes her prayer life,

⁶⁷ Interview #29.

the tenderness she experienced as a child viewing the Pieta-like sculpture seems to still be with her. She says, "I have sometimes a tenderness. If there is a person going through a hard time, I'll take a few moments and I'll pray for them."⁶⁸

Sarah noted that her guardian angels have become more important to her over the years. "That's what carried me through a lot of things—belief that I was always watched by something other than God."⁶⁹ Sarah then very bravely elaborated on the things that the angels had carried her through. The most difficult of these was a lengthy period of domestic abuse at the hand of her ex-husband. Sarah met her husband locally, though he was neither Catholic nor Italian. The violence began after their wedding and increased when the couple moved to another state, where Sarah was isolated from her large close family and her network of friends. "That's when it got worse. I tried to leave him more than once. I was in safe houses. I had my sisters mail me up my bond." Sarah became tearful as she spoke of the abuse and of her brush with death when she overdosed so that she wouldn't feel anything. She says, "I always believed in God. In the hard parts of my life, I don't think I would have made it if it wasn't for the man upstairs."⁷⁰ Indeed, Sarah tells me that her first prayer these days is one of gratitude for being alive. She then adds her thanks for family and friends.

Now, after being away from her ex-husband for seven years, Sarah continues to work through her healing process. Therapy, meditation, massage, and prayer are among

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Interview #29.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

her resources. She now prays most often, “straight to God.” When asked what she looks at while praying, she mentions her wooden angel, carved by a friend of her sister, and the picture of Saint Michael, the archangel. “Everything I went through with my ex-husband . . . I don’t think I could have done it if I didn’t know that the angels were watching me and guiding me through, giving me strength. The guardian angels carried me”⁷¹

Like the carved angel, the native American dream-catcher is also a hand-made gift from a friend. Sarah keeps this gift hanging above her bed. The idea of it, she explains, is that it catches any bad dreams before you have them, and allows only good dreams to pass through onto the sleeper.

Judith Herman, in her critical book on trauma and recovery, states that the two most important aspects of the recovery process for survivors of trauma are experiences of connection and empowerment.⁷² Sarah’s devotional habits of looking at the angels and saints, and experiencing their watchful presence in return, seem to me to contribute to her sense of being connected to God and other spiritual beings. In addition, the objects fortify her sense of social connection to the people who made them for her. Herman indicates that pictures or objects can be used by survivors of trauma to “enhance their sense of secure attachment through the use of evocative memory.”⁷³ On another level, Sarah’s large and close-knit family as well as her friends and her therapist each provide

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Judith Lewis Herman. *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 133-54.

⁷³ Ibid., 150.

some of the connection she needs as she works her way through this extended healing process.

I suspect that Sarah's use of visual images also addresses her need for empowerment. The placement of her diverse religious artifacts in her bedroom and above her bed suggests that they function as transitional objects, there for her when no one else is, helping her gain a sense of herself in a world that she is not completely able to control. The dream-catcher, in particular, is reminiscent of the mobiles that hang above baby cribs. This is not to belittle Sarah's coping skills, which are considerable. Rather it is to recognize the severity of the trauma Sarah endured, and her need to rebuild "from the bottom up" a sense of trust in the external world. Sarah demonstrates a creative use of religious artifacts in her strategy for recovering from post-traumatic stress. Sarah has been actively assembling what Winnicott might call an ego-supportive environment.

It is interesting that Sarah, who no longer attends church, freely mixes traditional Catholic pictures and symbols with more contemporary practices and objects that might be characterized as "New Age." It may be that the habit of relying on visual representations of the holy, which Sarah observed and absorbed from her childhood and especially from her mother, is reflected in Sarah's entire repertoire of personal and spiritual resources for healing. Not only is her fondness for certain images preserved, but so is her very capacity to use tangible and visible objects in service of her healing and spiritual growth.

Matthew

The practice of religious mixing⁷⁴ is also evident in the visual piety of a young man from the fourth immigrant generation. Matthew, age twenty-four, is extremely intense and thoughtful about his faith. This is immediately evident from looking around the living room of the apartment he rents in a windy section of San Pedro, down near the beach. On one side of the room is a bookshelf containing a considerable theological library. On the other side is an elaborate altar, built upon and around an antique table (Figure 27 and Figure 28). The altar features numerous sculpted Buddhas that Matthew has collected from Tibet, China, and Los Angeles. A statue of Saint Francis rests among the Buddhas, as do two candles, on either side of the table. A centrally located crucifix, with a cross made out of palm behind it, is mounted on the wall above the table. This crucifix once rested on the casket of Matthew's beloved uncle, who committed suicide some years ago. Above the crucifix hangs a prominent picture of Thomas Merton and the Dalai Lama, two of Matthew's most significant sources of inspiration. He says of them, "These are the two people who represent to me the core or pillars of the faiths that I gravitate to the strongest: Catholicism and Buddhism. Their teachings and their lives and their thoughts have shaped my understanding of who I am."⁷⁵ Notably absent are any representations of Mary.

⁷⁴ I take this term from an essay by Catherine Albanese, entitled "Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls: Contact, Combination, and American Religious History," in Thomas A. Tweed, ed., *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 223. Albanese demonstrates that religion in America has always involved the mixing of various faith traditions and practices, including Native American influences.

⁷⁵ Interview #30.

Matthew grew up attending Mary Star, where he was an altar boy for five years. He counted collection money in the church for many years as well. Matthew says that he loved being around the church, loved hanging out in the choir loft when his grandmother sang in the choir. It was when he took a world religions course in his Catholic high school, and read his first book by the Dalai Lama, that Matthew became interested in Buddhism and “was hooked” ever since. Matthew describes this as a scary time: “Finding things and doctrines that were not only different but contradictory to what I was taught . . . realizing that faith is not an easy thing, that it can’t be swallowed blindly. It has to be sought after in order for it to really be faith.”⁷⁶

When asked whether he prays to any saints, Matthew says quickly, “I pray for the inspiration of what the saints represented. I pray for the drive and the charisma of Saint Francis. I pray for the totality of Ignatius . . . and I pray for the quiet of mind of Teresa of Avila, for the intense mystic spirituality of John of the Cross. . . . I don’t pray to the Saints per se, but everything they represent is so real in and of itself, that I think it’s almost the same thing.” Matthew’s religious practices do not seem to me to be “the same thing” as the more traditional practices of the devout. His faith is more searching, and he is more inclined toward theological and philosophical debate. He doesn’t pray the rosary or make novenas. And he has embraced Buddhism at least as much as Catholicism.

But Matthew’s faith is strong, and for this he credits his Catholic upbringing. He elaborates: “I owe my current religious practices to Catholicism. My prayer has taken on

⁷⁶ Ibid.

a different form, which is contemplative prayer and centering, emptying the mind of discursive thought. Saint John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila taught this meditation. To be schooled in different ways of prayer is highly valuable.”⁷⁷ Matthew told me that he meditates almost every day—four to five times a week, though he would like to do more.

When interviewing Matthew, I remembered from my interview with his grandmother that she, too, had been reading Thomas Merton. I asked Matthew if he had given his grandmother the book. To my surprise, Matthew said no, she’d given him his first Thomas Merton book. He then went on to credit this (paternal) grandmother and his deceased grandfather with much of his inspiration. He said,

The attitude of camaraderie has always been with my family. It’s related to the Italianness of it. Kind of like the passion for life, and the ability to really enjoy life. You’ve met my grandmother, she’s not a wallflower, she’s a player in the game. She’s been a big part of my life. . . . My grandfather, too, he was a huge role-model to me. I wanted to be just like him. A person of incredible character, charisma, and strength. I’d like to think that I’m like him or at least in the process of becoming like him.

From my brief meeting with Matthew, I’d say he is well on his way to achieving these qualities. He impresses me as outgoing, articulate, and joyful. He seems to approach many of the areas of his life with the same energy and passion he brings to his practice of religion. His way of speaking conveys strength and clarity, and yet exquisite sensitivity. For example, when I asked him if his prayers are answered, Matthew responded, “My prayers are answered every time a bird sings or a flower blooms. That’s just what I thank

⁷⁷ Interview #30.

God for, the beauty of creation, without any ulterior motive.”⁷⁸ I was moved by Matthew’s intense and genuine demeanor.

Though Matthew’s religious ideas and practices are more diverse than those of his grandmother or his father (whom I also interviewed), the use of religious images and objects is a common practice across the four generations in his family. As in Sarah’s case, Matthew’s religious practice does not seem to have much to do with imagined or real Italian homelands. However, he does have a strong sense about his ethnic and religious identity: “Being an Italian Catholic—those terms are synonymous to me. . . . It’s a big part of who I am. The root of me—inescapable, and I wouldn’t want to escape it.” Matthew’s strong sense of Italian identity, which he describes as “FBI—full-blooded Italian,” is melded to his sense of himself as Catholic. His choice of the word “inescapable” might suggest ambivalence. Yet I think he is primarily alluding to the strong “given” quality of his combined Italian Catholic identity. The weight of his parents,’ grandparents,’ and great-grandparents’ stories provide him with a strong sense of rootedness, something that he loves and depends on and may also at times find confining. He described some traditional Catholic doctrines as making him feel as if he was “in a box.” Perhaps Matthew’s Buddhist orientation, which he has innovatively incorporated in his altar, helps him move beyond the box. His regular association with Buddhist monks in Los Angeles also brings him into religious or spiritual connection with persons who are not of Italian descent, moving him beyond the box in another

⁷⁸ Ibid.

way—socially. Matthew’s visual piety, rooted in his childhood experiences at Mary Star—which included staring at a stained-glass window depicting the saint he was named after—is one habit from his “inherited” repertoire of Italian Catholic devotional practices that he has not escaped, but may be in the process of transforming.

Though Matthew’s forms of prayer and theological constructions have expanded, his level of devotional practice is no less frequent or profound. In fact, because his faith seemed so vibrant, I asked Matthew if he had ever considered seminary. He responded that he had, as recently as three days ago, though he indicated that he is not optimistic about the priesthood. “If I feel like I’m in a box now, how would I feel then?” he asks rhetorically.

Like others discussed in this chapter, Matthew’s religious practices link him to the memory of deceased family members, particularly his grandfather whom he admired and his uncle. Matthew’s beloved uncle and godfather, whom he was said to resemble physically, suffered from severe depression and committed suicide at age twenty-three. I wonder if the religious and familial bonds of devotion were not somehow intensified when the shared family memory expanded to encompass this tragedy.

When asked how he deals with adversity, Matthew said, “Pretty good. And a lot of that has to do with my faith.” He recalled one point in his life, when his grandfather died, his parents got divorced, and he broke up with his girlfriend of two years, all in three weeks’ time. He said, “I have a very sensitive heart, and that was the time in my life when that heart was aching. But everybody’s got their own story. Everybody’s been

through stuff like that and far, far, worse than that.” Maybe. Matthew didn’t mention that during the time these three significant events were unfolding, his father was also undergoing treatment for a life-threatening infection in his back. Additionally, Matthew noted that his mother has suffered from chronic migraine headaches for many years. Matthew’s personal and family history and his “sensitive heart” may be held in a particularly important way through his mindful religious devotions.

Many of the objects incorporated into Matthew’s altar were gifts, such as the Saint Francis statue given to him by a priest in high school, and the scroll with a scripture passage inscribed on it in calligraphy, given to him by a nun at a school retreat (Figure 29). As Matthew gazes at this altar, these items probably recall the givers of these gifts, as well as the religious meanings assigned to them. Seeing these religious gifts from his tender high school years, just before the series of losses he described, may help Matthew experience the feeling of being seen, remembered, and/or held. Notably, the scripture verse on the scroll reads: “See, I will not forget you. I have carved you on the palm of my hand” (Isa. 49:15). This is a striking passage, suggesting divine bonds of memory that are visual, and inscribed—literally—on God’s body. Matthew’s complex altar is also a mirror or reflection of himself, his life, and the intense faith that makes him who he is. It is a faith that, in his words, “is not an easy thing.”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Interview #30.

Conclusion

Italian Catholic religious images appear to function in diverse ways at different moments in people's lives in San Pedro. The multivalence of images is assumed here.⁸⁰ There is no one fixed meaning or use for religious images or objects. There are instead what Leigh Schmidt might call "charged moments of encounter, exchange, practice, and relationship."⁸¹ In certain ways, these religious images seem to be conservative influences, protecting and preserving people in crises, and simultaneously preserving the older worlds and worldviews. In light of the strain of immigrants' experiences of dislocation, this conservative religious tendency is not surprising. These women and men have been about the work of finding a space and a place, both literally and symbolically, in this new land. Thus their bonds of affection and attachment to natal lands, to their religious artifacts and beliefs, and to each other, have acquired magnified significance.

Paul Connerton writes,

We preserve versions of the past by representing it to ourselves in words and images. . . . Our bodies . . . keep the past also in an entirely effective form in their continuing ability to perform certain skilled actions.⁸²

The capacity to engage in visual piety, to draw religious meaning from the practice of looking at sacred images, is an ability that almost all of the persons I interviewed in San Pedro share. As they perform this skilled action, they preserve their various versions of

⁸⁰ Miles. *Image as Insight*. 30.

⁸¹ Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Practices of Exchange: From Market Culture to Gift Economy in the Interpretation of American Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 72.

⁸² Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72.

the past, and use them to inform, direct, or undergird their present lives. As these individuals make their way, negotiating “the strain of relating inner and outer reality,” their skill in visual devotion provides them with significant spiritual, emotional, and pastoral resources. It also re-enforces social and familial connections, through shared experiences, impressions, and artistic and religious sensibilities, as well as ritual gatherings.

But these same religious images and artifacts appear to spark innovation, combination, and resistance. Members of the younger immigrant generations, such as Sarah and Matthew, show considerable creativity in their use of this visual skill. Even as they move away from some of the habits and beliefs of their parents and grandparents, they still rely on visual images that mirror and reinforce religious bonds, familial ties, and a sense of connectedness to supernatural beings and/or transcendent wisdom. As members of the third and fourth immigrant generations, their religious practices are predictably less focused on homelands. The connection between family and faith seems strong for both of them, as does their affection for religious images that recall their childhood experiences of faith.

The visual practice of devotion is, in Connerton’s words, “sedimented, or amassed, in the body.”⁸³ It is a habit and a capacity that can create access to the transitional realm. Interestingly, Connerton and Winnicott, from their diverse fields of study, make similar claims about the way that change and innovation are intertwined with

⁸³ Connerton. 72.

the past. Connerton writes, in reference to what he calls inscribed knowledge, "The standard edition and the canonical work . . . this fixity is the spring that releases innovation."⁸⁴ Similarly, Winnicott writes, "in any cultural field, it is not possible to be original except on the basis of tradition."⁸⁵ Perhaps it is because of the strength and fixity of the traditions with which persons such as Sarah and Matthew grew up, that they are able to diverge from their parents' spiritual paths in such creative and life-giving ways. Retaining the visual skills that they learned as children, and at least a few of the very same images, they take up their quests for personal healing and spiritual enlightenment with admirable determination. Along these lines, Winnicott muses, "The interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness seems to me to be just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union."⁸⁶ We have seen the "interplay of separateness and union" in several aspects of visual piety. We can continue to think about how this theme gets played out in various other dimensions of the devotional practices.

This exploration of the visual dimensions of the devotions begins to explain the vitality of the bonds of religion in this setting. The visual form of the devotions roots them in a bodily knowledge that is hard to forget. The near omnipresence of visual representations of Mary, Jesus, saints, and angels, along with their close connections to natal lands and family members, helps to account for much of the intensity and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 75.

⁸⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 99.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

persistence of devotional practices among the families I interviewed. The robust practice of the devotions can further be explained by the devout's historical experiences related not only to immigration, but also to the fishing occupation. In the next chapter, we will turn to the subject of fishing, to see how the parallel themes of separateness and union, and attachment and loss, have played out historically in this context.

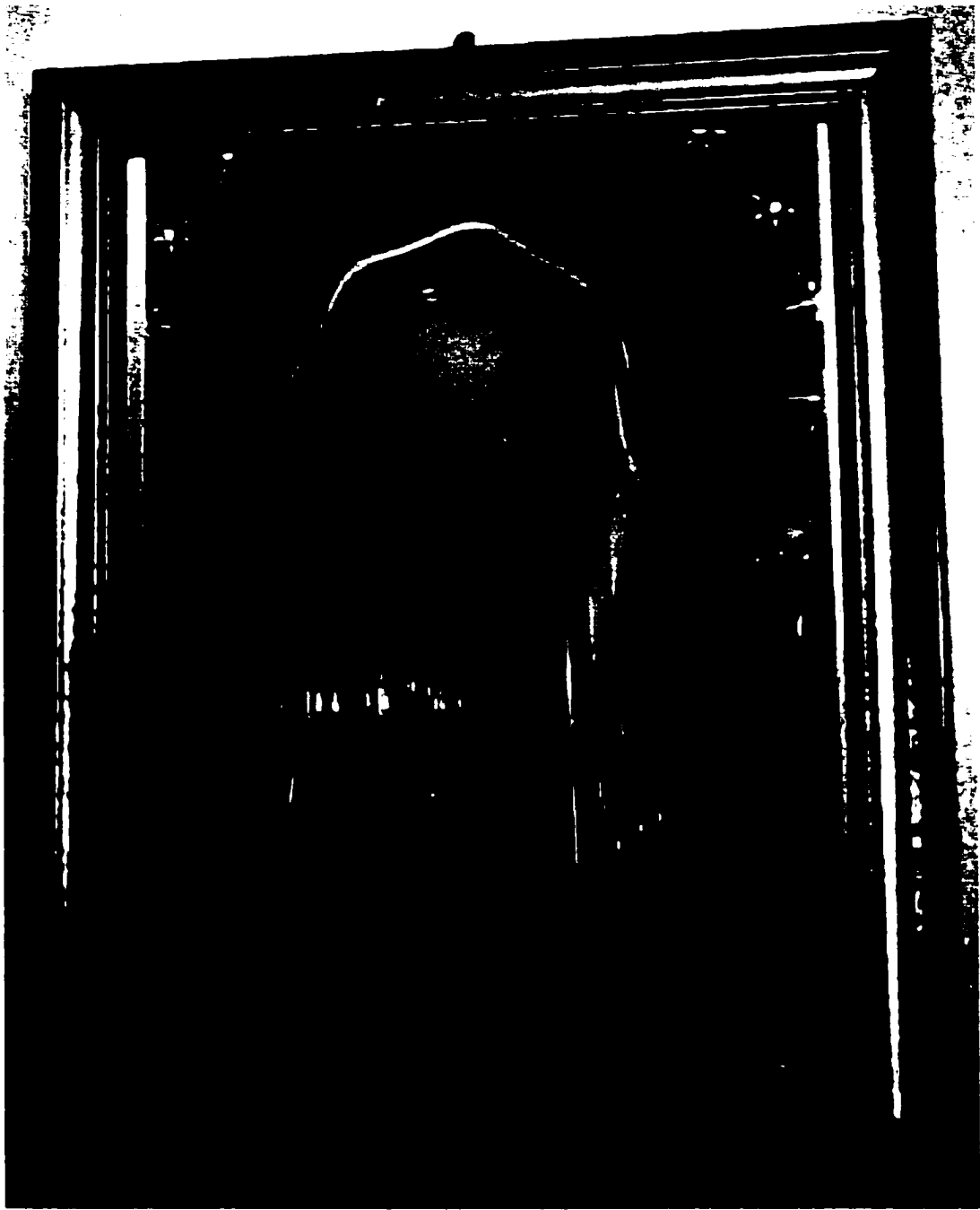


Figure 6 - "Rosa Mistica." This portrait of an Italian statue of Mary hangs in the dining room of a devout. The left eye of the Madonna is said to be alive, "real."



Figure 7 - Bronze statue of Mary, located on a tower at Mary Star of the Sea one hundred feet above the ground. The statue faces the bay and can be seen by fishermen as they approach the harbor.



Figure 8 - Mosaic depicting Mary Star of the Sea, located on the 7th Street side of the church. The caption reads, "*Maria Stella Maris Ora Pro Nobis*," "Mary, Star of the Sea, pray for us."

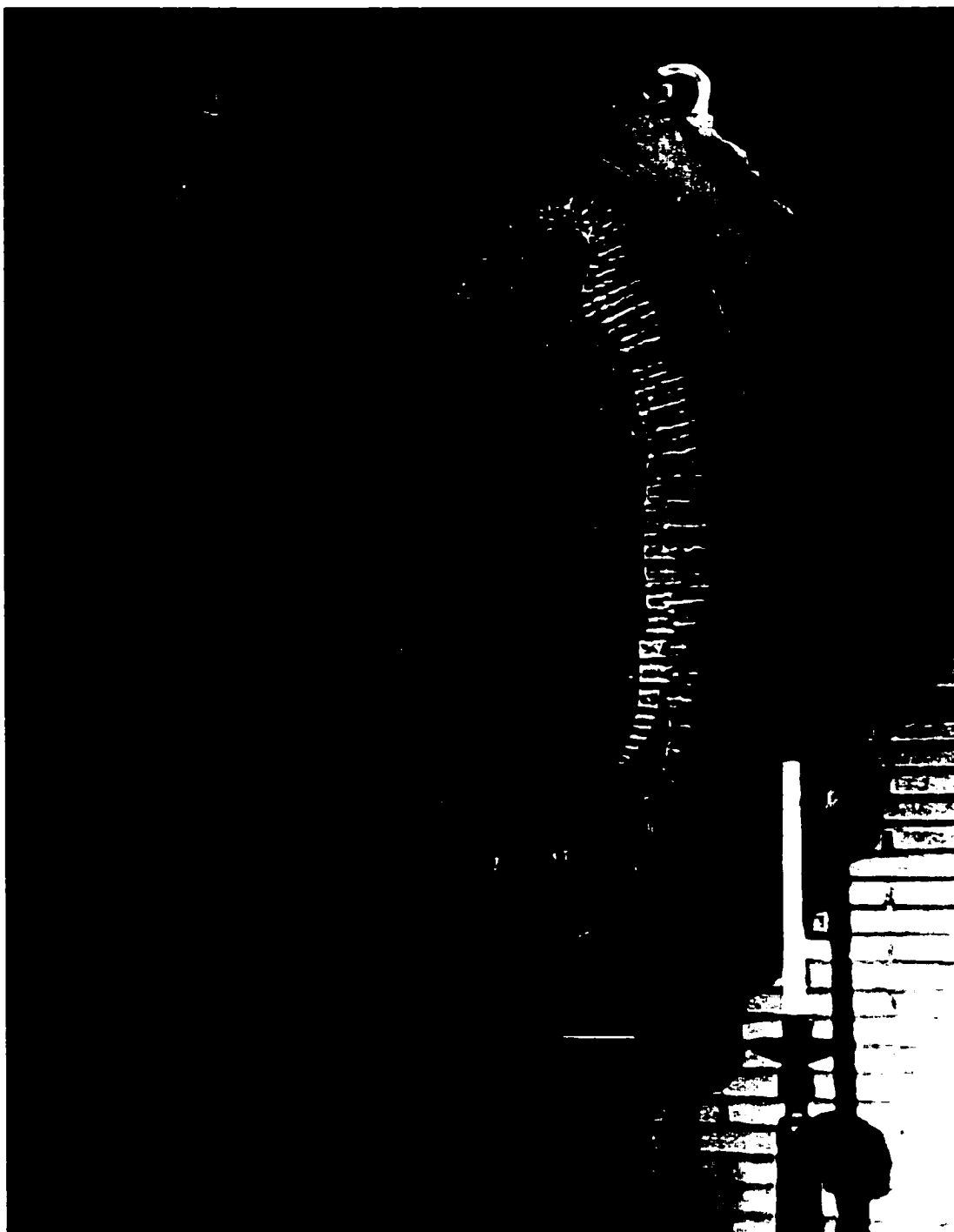


Figure 9 - Altar to Our Lady of Guadalupe, located at the front of the church, directly to the right of the baptismal font. This altar is a focal point for Mexican devotions in the church.

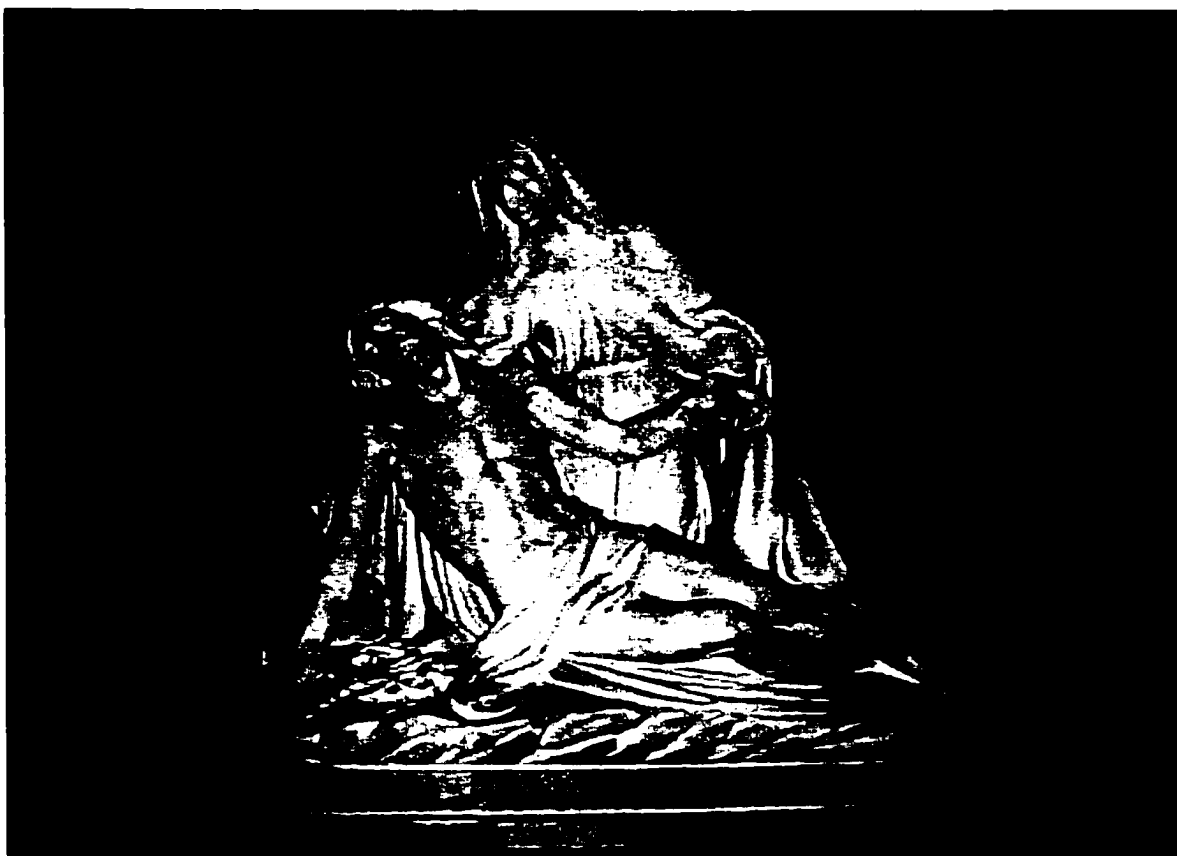


Figure 10 – Mary embracing the crucified Jesus. This statue, recalling Michaelangelo's *Pieta* for some, resides in a side altar of the sanctuary of Mary Star of the Sea.



Figure 11 - Our Mother of Perpetual Help. This altar, located in an alcove to the right of Our Lady of Guadalupe, is well-tended with banks of electric candles and a large book in which the devout regularly inscribe their prayers.

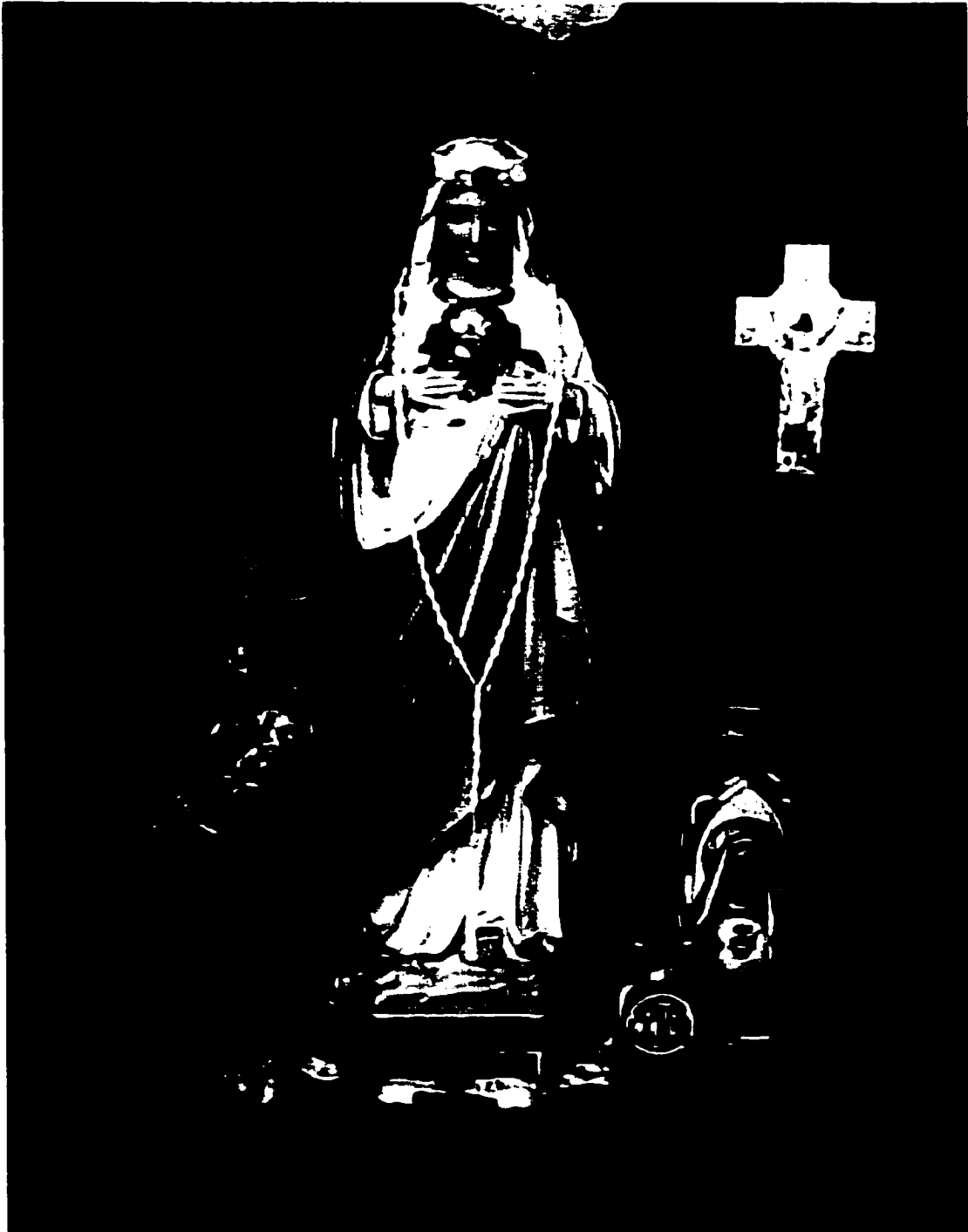


Figure 12 - Classroom shrine. This small shrine includes the Immaculate Heart of Mary with floral crown and rosary beads, Saint Joseph, candle, and small toy. It occupies the corner of a classroom in Mary Star's elementary school.

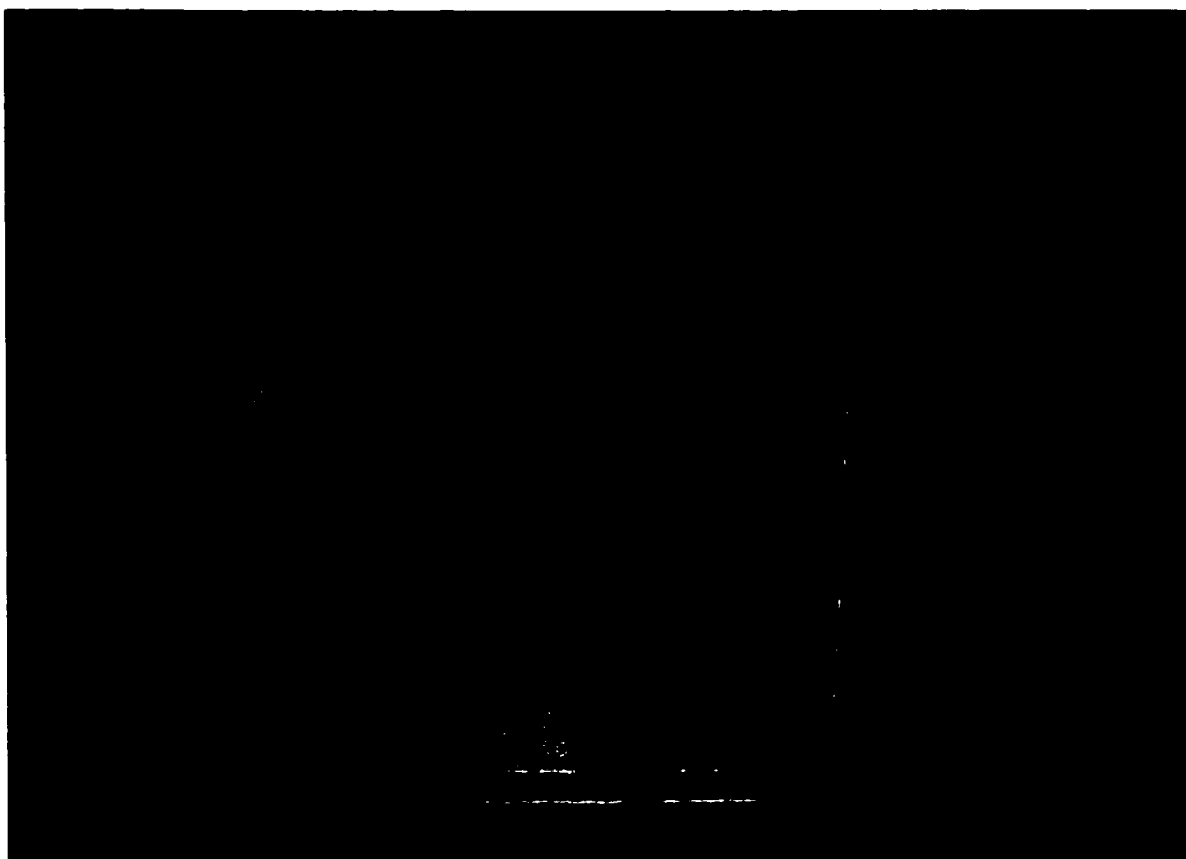


Figure 13 – This stylized portrait of the Madonna was purchased in Italy and given as a wedding gift to a young couple in San Pedro.



Figure 14 - Pencil drawing of Mary done by one of the interviewees.

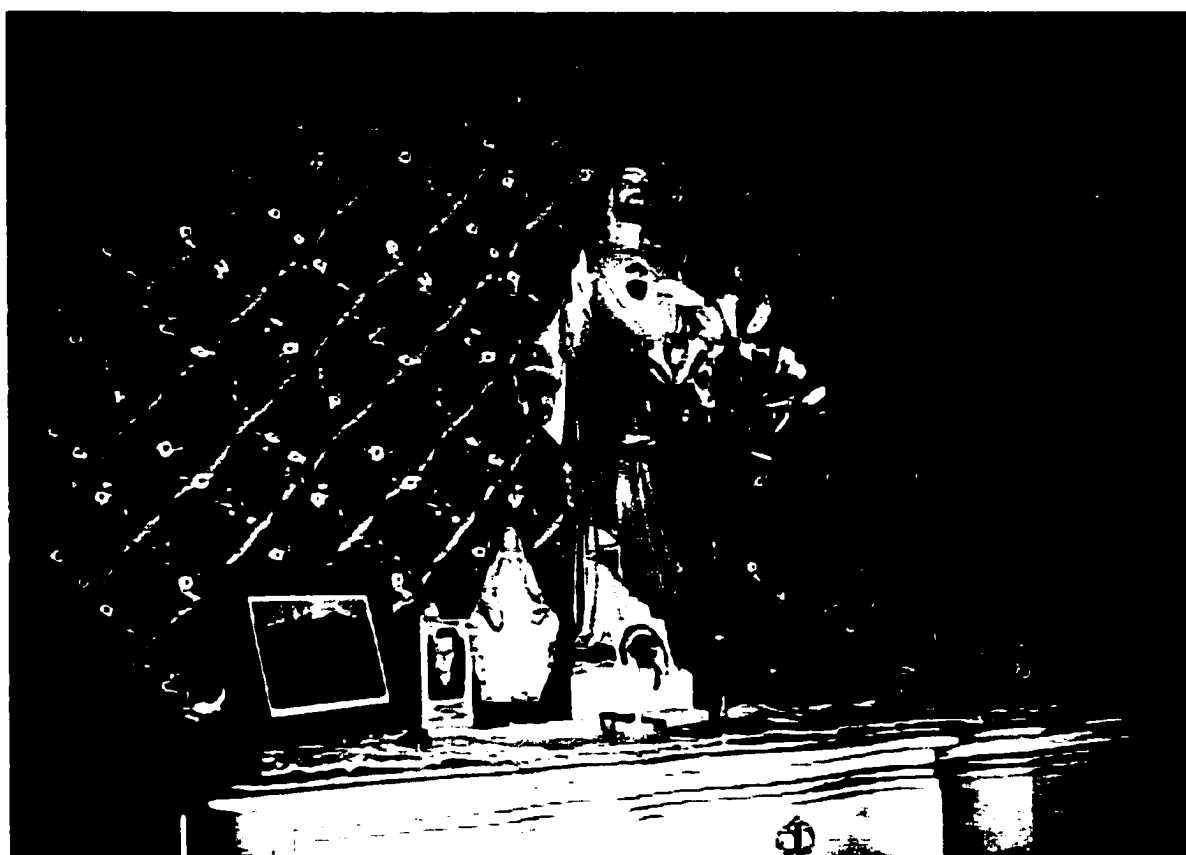


Figure 15 - Dresser-top home altar. This altar combines a statue of the Sacred Heart, one of Mary, a picture of Mother Teresa, and personal photographs of the devout and loved ones. Note the presence of fresh flowers and votive candle.



Figure 16 – This home altar in a hallway corner includes Saint Joseph, a small crucifix, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, photo of Saint John-Joseph of the Cross, child's photo, candle, electric lamp, and flowers.



Figure 17 - Sacred Heart with Saints. This very busy home altar is built up with a platform. The Sacred Heart statue dominates, but the candle-lit altar includes many lesser figures such as the popular Padre Pio on the right.



Figure 18 - Saint John-Joseph of the Cross, occupying a side altar at Mary Star. He is the patron saint of Ischia, an island off the coast of Naples from whence many San Pedro immigrants hail.



Figure 19 - Mother's photo with rosary beads. This photo rests on the devout's night table, along with flashlight and bedroom slippers.



Figure 20 – This crowded altar is built around a photo of the devout's deceased husband. Behind him are Joseph and Mary, and behind them, the Sacred Heart. Note bottles of medication on left and statues of St. Anthony (behind flower), Padre Pio, and Madonna on right. Photos on the wall frame the altar.



Figure 21 - Mirrored dresser-top altar with John-Joseph of the Cross, photos of loved ones, silk flowers, and an American flag. The author taking the photograph is partially visible in the mirror.



Figure 22 - Mirrored dresser-top altar to Saint Joseph with small Madonna and personal items, with Sacred Heart statue and photographs on left. The matching vases of silk flowers and their symmetrical arrangement add a liturgical quality.



Figure 23 - Impromptu kitchen altar. This altar memorializes the immigrant's recently deceased sister. A statue of St. Teresa, patroness of Verona, stands among photographs of the deceased and a clock with a picture of Sacred Heart.

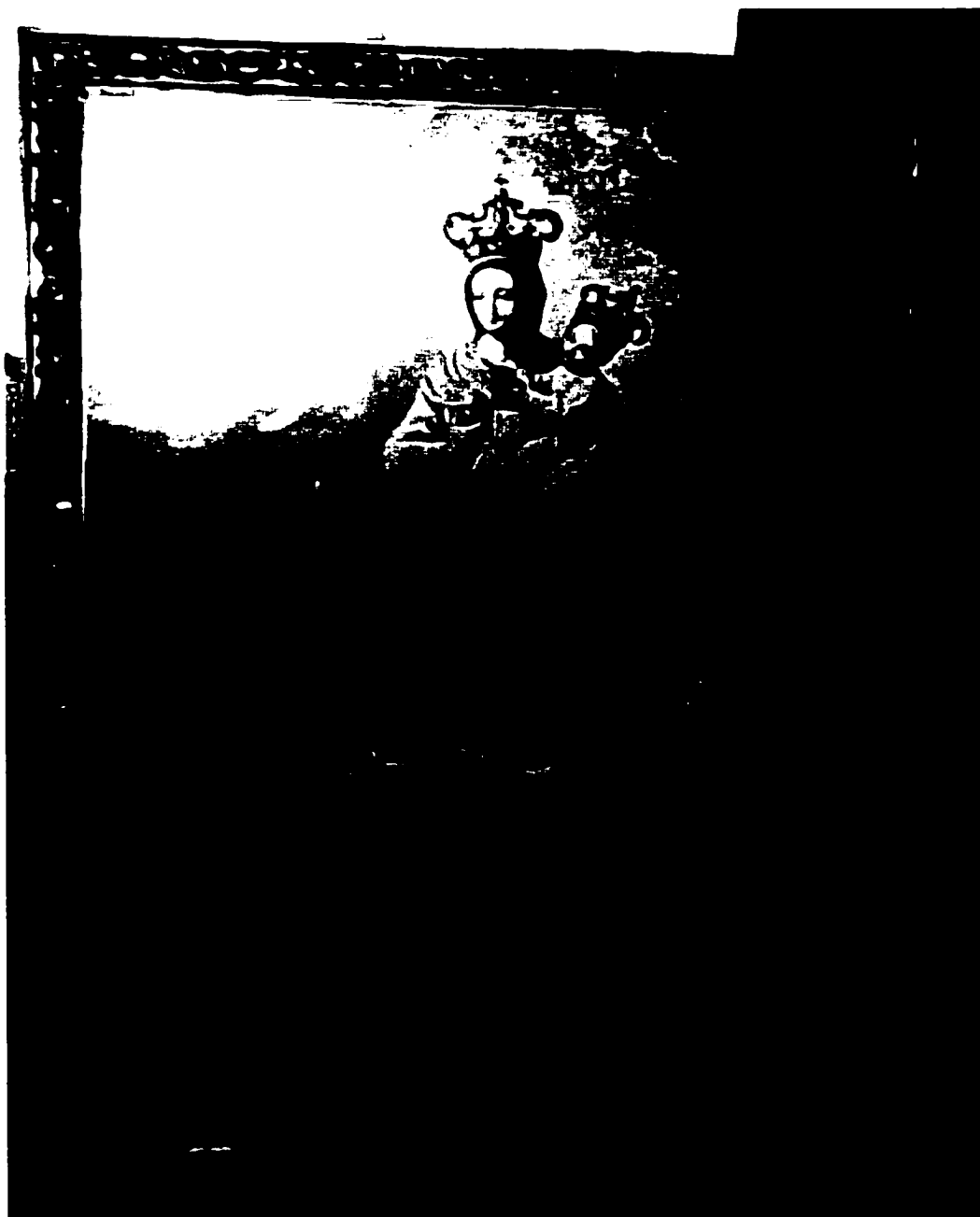


Figure 24 - Our Lady of the Bridge, patroness of Trapani, Sicily. Note Peter and Paul, on either side of the bridge. The painting usually hangs in formal living room.



Figure 25 - Our Lady of Fatima. This statue, which resides in a bay window in the devout's bedroom, is said to be smiling.



Figure 26 - Angel with assorted devotional items. This collection includes a hand-crafted wooden angel, a Native American dream-catcher, a picture of St. Michael crushing Lucifer (who is pictured with dark skin), and a scapular.



Figure 27 - Buddhist/Catholic altar. This living room altar combines numerous statues of the Buddha with one of St. Francis. Devotional items include a crucifix, palm, candles, Tibetan prayer bell, Buddhist prayer beads and shawl.



Figure 28 - Close-up view of Buddhist/Catholic altar. Note the photograph of Thomas Merton with the Dalai Lama. The Buddhas are from Tibet, Thailand, China, and Los Angeles.

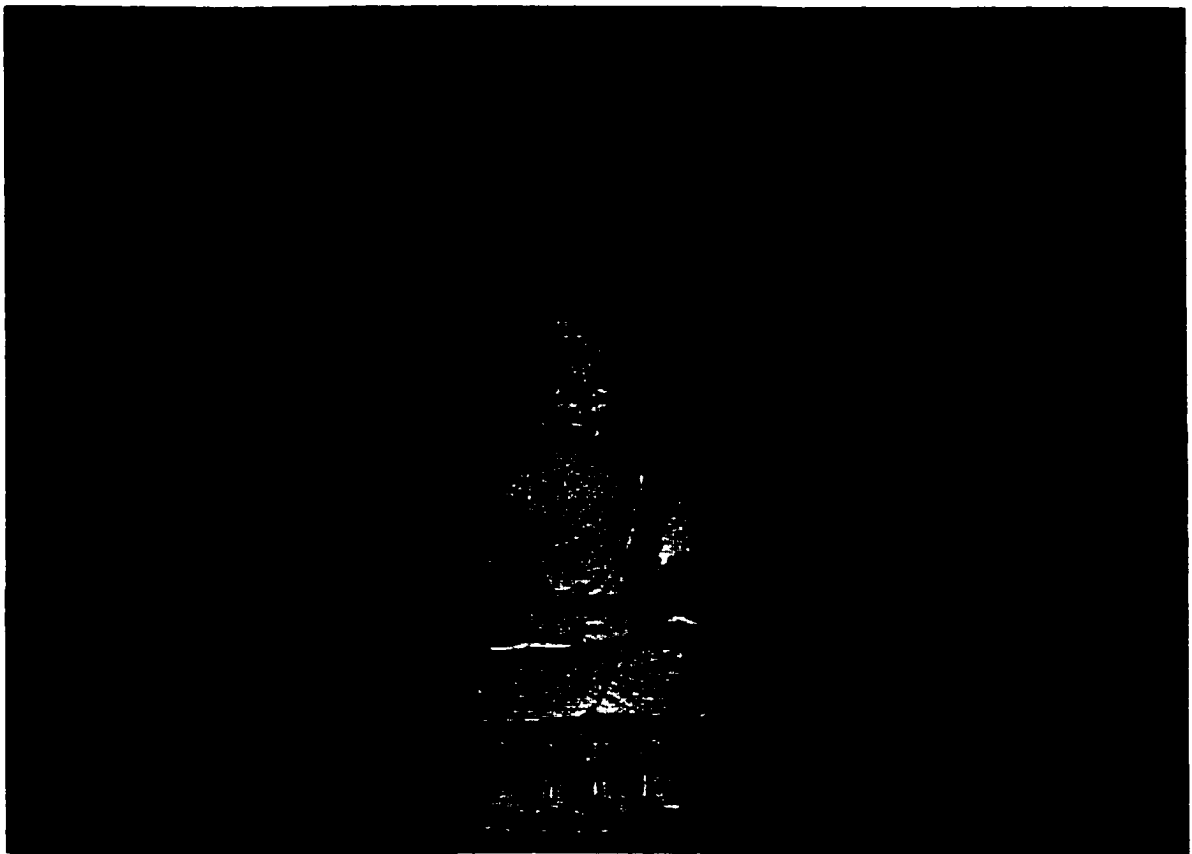


Figure 29 - Closer view of altar showing the scroll behind it that reads, "See, I will not forget you. I have carved you on the palm of my hand" (Isaiah 49:15).

CHAPTER 3

Fishing, Fear, and Faith

Anyone who has been through a severe storm at sea has, to one degree or another, almost died, and that fact will continue to alter them long after the wind has stopped blowing and the waves have died down. Like a war or a great fire, the effects of a storm go rippling outward through webs of people for years, even generations.

Sebastian Junger, *The Perfect Storm*

Sebastian Junger's words summarize the impact of a major Atlantic storm on the town and people of Gloucester, Massachusetts, a New England fishing village. San Pedro, like Gloucester, has seen its share of tragic fishing accidents at sea. In the last hundred years, the commercial fishing of tuna as well as white sea bass, mackerel, squid, and sardines has employed thousands of immigrants, and proven extremely lucrative for boat and cannery owners. But fishing here has been a difficult and dangerous enterprise, too, and numerous lives have been lost in these waters.

Many of the people I interviewed in San Pedro were happy to tell me about the beauty of living near the sea, its wonder and inspiration. Several immigrants spoke of the physical resemblance that the landscape bears to the southern coast of Italy. Many informants also gladly told me what they could remember about the rise and fall of the fishing industry in this place, the wealth and abundance that fishing and canning once brought to the region, and the inter-connections between Mary Star of the Sea parish and the fishing life. But the storms, accidents, and hardship related to the fishing industry seemed to be the hardest part of the story to tell. The folks I interviewed were often

reluctant to describe their memories of loss, or their experiences of almost dying, that have altered them and had a lasting impact on their families and friends.

It is the thesis of this chapter that fishing has had a tremendous impact on the prayers of the people, their way of life, their immigration to San Pedro, their love for this place, and for their church. In particular, I suggest that the extremes of the fishing life have informed and intensified the devotional practices of Italian immigrants and their families. The extremes of the fishing life include several features. First, the great wealth and happiness of good times when the nets are full and the prices are high contrast with the stark poverty and desperation during times of dwindling prices and/or fish stocks. Secondly, the risk of serious injury or even a watery grave, should the boat be overloaded or a storm come up, is another extreme feature of this occupation. Memories of the loss of life at sea, or the fear of such loss, constitute a subtext running throughout this story. Third, the harsh conditions of the fishing life, such as the sheer strain of the physical labor, tend to wear men down, and can also be the source of injuries. For example, cooking onboard a ship can be hazardous—one former ship's cook suffered serious burns on the job when the boat met high seas and the oil he was cooking with spilled on his arms.¹ Many others report injuries from the strain of pulling in the nets. Finally, the need for fishermen to be away from home for prolonged periods of time adds another extreme dimension to their lives. This occupation with its highs and lows exerts considerable emotional strain, not only on fishermen themselves, but also on their families. Local

¹ Interview # 17. The speaker was the father of the woman I was interviewing, who helpfully joined our conversation.

Italian Catholic devotions reflect, celebrate, enact, and memorialize this occupation, with all of its extremes.

It has been the genius of the pastors of Mary Star of the Sea parish over the years to allow and encourage the donation of artifacts, the establishment of numerous sodalities and confraternities, and a proliferation of feasts and rituals that address the exigencies of the fishing life. These practices have encouraged loyalty to the local church by affirming the bonds between the Catholic Church, the fishermen, and their distinct national origins. This pastoral strategy has also helped bring diverse immigrants and their descendants together within one parish, gradually mitigating ethnic tensions. The devotional societies have functioned as pastoral resources to help immigrant fishermen and their families address the spiritual, emotional, and practical crises that have arisen in the course of their shared histories of immigration and occupation.

In this chapter, I will describe the interplay between devotional practices and the history of the fishing industry in San Pedro. I will show how Mary Star of the Sea parish has been shaped and influenced by this industry and by the large numbers of immigrants that have come here to fish. I will include in this discussion accounts of two popular ritual events: the Fisherman's Fiesta, which had its heyday in the early 1950s; and the San Pietro Blessing of the Fleet, a scaled-down contemporary feast that includes some elements of the earlier tradition. These events reflect the rise and fall of the fishing industry, along with the shifting fortunes of many Mary Star parishioners. I will also describe the exigencies of the fishing industry, including its effect on the lives of families.

Finally, I will focus our attention on my interviewees' accounts of fishing and boating accidents, demonstrating how the effects of these losses reverberate through the community and through the generations. If Winnicott's theory of the transitional realm has helped us understand the function and robust quality of visual devotion to the saints, this description of the vicissitudes of the fishing industry in San Pedro can further account for the intensity with which the devotions have been practiced and preserved.

Fishing and Mary Star of the Sea

Both the abundance of the Pacific Ocean and the loss of life therein are memorialized in the art and artifacts in the current sanctuary of Mary Star of the Sea parish. The large centrally placed marble statue of Mary holding a tuna clipper in her arm is a graphic depiction of the importance of the fishing industry to this community. Mary holds the purse seiner in her left arm as she might the Christ child, symbolically protecting it and sacralizing it at the same time (Figure 2). I have been told that tuna money paid for this statue, and that there was initially some resistance on the part of the clergy to the idea of having such a large and prominent statue of Mary, rather than a crucifix, in the center of the chancel. Supposedly, the will of the fish plant owner won out, when he threatened to withhold significant contributions to the church. I have no way of knowing whether this last detail is accurate, but the majority of my interviews as well as my documentary sources confirm that Mary Star has been considered a "fishermen's church" for many years.

The two prominent stained glass windows on either side of the sanctuary also address the hopes and fears of fishermen and their families: the window depicting the stilling of the Galilean storm (Figure 4) bespeaks the danger of life at sea, as well as the people's hope that God's power will save them and their loved ones from peril; the window on the opposite side, illustrating the gospel story of the abundant catch (Figure 3), captures the people's hope for a good livelihood derived from the sea. This hope has motivated many immigrant fishermen, cannery workers, net-menders, boat builders and owners, seafood merchants, restaurateurs, and fish processing plant owners alike. While some have derived great wealth from these industries, many workers have just managed to make a living, enduring strenuous physical labor and times of severe economic hardship. Their livelihoods have hung in the balance over the years as they have dealt with continually changing weather conditions, fish stocks, habitats, prices, and national and international fishing regulations. The size and placement of these windows reflect the reality of the community's economic reliance on the sea, and suggest divine sanction of their way of life, by associating it with Jesus. The stained glass windows, created and installed in the church during good times, also signify the optimism of the prayers of fishermen at mid-century—that the abundant catches would continue, and that they themselves would be protected in their high-risk occupation.

Prosperity and the Pastorate of George M. Scott

The good times that the fishing and canning industries in San Pedro enjoyed coincided with the tenure of the church's longest-serving pastor, the Very Reverend

Monsignor George M. Scott, 1946-1975. When Scott arrived, San Pedro's population had been boosted by World War II to approximately sixty thousand. At that point, San Pedro was the largest commercial fishing port in the United States. In 1948, San Pedro's year-end catch was valued at \$30,000,000. Nearby Terminal Island was the home of several profitable canneries, including Star-Kist, Van de Camp's, Pan Pacific Fisheries, and South Pacific Canning Company. According to Joe Canetti, owner of Canetti's Seafood Grotto since 1949, the smell of fish cooking at the canneries was as familiar as it was welcomed. People called it "the aroma of money,"² because the smell was a sure indication that the fishing boats had returned full. When the boats were really laden down, the fish at the bottom of the haul would be crushed—"mashed and mushed," as Canetti put it. This part of the catch couldn't be sold for consumption, so instead it was cooked up and sold as fertilizer. This cooking process gave off the welcomed aroma. During this time, wholesale and retail fish markets and boat works also thrived. Along with the busy oil and lumber port, and the sizable military installation at Fort MacArthur, the seafood industries constituted one of the three pillars of San Pedro's economy.³

A 1949 article in *The Tidings*, a local Catholic weekly, stresses the connection between Mary Star of the Sea, the "Harbor Parish," and the fishing industry. The article notes parishioners' involvement in the various industries related to fishing. Several

² Informational interview # 02.

³ Informational interview # 01. A list of 1950 businesses compiled by Charles Queenan includes: "Shipping lines, commercial trucking companies, transcontinental railroads, petroleum and lumber companies, ship and boatbuilding and repair firms, canneries, stevedore companies, ship chandlery and marine supply firms, marine surveyors, pleasure craft berthing, customs brokers and others." Cited in Mary Zangs, "Terminal Island History," in *Shoreline* (San Pedro, Calif.: San Pedro Historical Society, 1991), 25.

parishioners are named, including Aniella Scalo, fisherman, Giosue Di Masa, a wholesale fish dealer, and John Jerkovich, "twice head of the Holy Name Society, who markets seafood throughout the Los Angeles area." The article also mentions that thousands are employed in the Terminal Island canneries.⁴

The strong connection between Mary Star and the fishing industry can also be seen in the clergy's long record of involvement with fishermen. Father Luigi Pecorella, an Italian priest appointed as an assistant pastor in 1918, served as a federal mediator in San Diego in a dispute between striking Italian fishermen and sardine packers.⁵ Later, many pastors became chaplains to fishermen and other seamen through the "Apostleship of the Sea," an organization that Father James McLaughlin (pastor from 1934-46) helped found. McLaughlin is also reported to have entered the fray of the "notorious longshoremen's strike of 1938,"⁶ providing housing and food and securing a priest to preach a mission among the longshoremen.

When Monsignor George Scott came to the harbor area in 1946, the Mary Star parish was still housed in a 450-seat wood-frame structure built in 1905. But the church was already outgrowing its space. In a commemorative booklet that the church put together for California's Centennial in 1949, there is a photograph of the outside of this sanctuary with numerous people standing nearby. The caption reads, "Any Sunday:

⁴ Cited in William S. Vita et al., "Sixty Years in Our Parish (1889-1949)." (San Pedro, Calif.: Mary Star of the Sea Parish, 1949), 51.

⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶ Ibid., 26. The year of the strike to which the author was referring was probably 1934 rather than 1938. For a description of the major longshoremen's strike of 1934 that stretched from Bellingham, Wash.

People Wait in Line to Enter Church for One of Ten Masses.” Taking advantage of both the crowds of people and their post-war prosperity, Scott soon began a million-dollar building campaign that funded a new convent and established the church’s first high school. The project expanded to include the building of the church’s current sanctuary at 870 West Eighth Street.

Scott had arrived at an opportune moment. His predecessor, Fr. James McLaughlin, had already nurtured church growth during the population expansion of the war years. He had also cleared up an inherited debt of \$100,000.⁷ When Scott arrived, he built upon this legacy. By this time, several prominent businessmen in the fishing industry were members of Mary Star of the Sea. Two were Joseph Bogdanovich and his son Martin, whose company, Star-Kist, had become the largest fish-canning company in the world.⁸ When people tell me that fishing built the church, part of what they are indicating is that donations from such successful individuals funded the building projects.⁹ At the same time, many smaller, but equally crucial, donations from devout fishing families complemented this munificence.

to San Diego, see Otilie Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity: Pacific Coast Unionism, 1929-1938* (Tacoma, Wash.: Pacific Coast Maritime History Committee, 1998), 76-103.

⁷ Bobich and Palmer, 13-14.

⁸ Arthur Bartlett, “Islands of San Pedro Bay,” in *Shoreline* (San Pedro, Calif.: San Pedro Historical Society, 1997), 34.

⁹ For reflections on the commodification of sacred space, see David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, Introduction, *American Sacred Space*, eds. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 28.

Ethnicity and Americanization at Mary Star

In a 1975 interview, Monsignor George Scott claimed that when he was sent to Mary Star, San Pedro was “the most unwanted parish in four counties. The ‘foreign element’ was not understood. No one wanted to tackle the ethnic mixture.”¹⁰ But Scott, whose father was a well-known judge in Los Angeles, and whose mother had taught him to speak Spanish and French as well as English, relished the challenge. During the course of his tenure at Mary Star, he was assisted by seven priests, several of whom were also multi-lingual. They reportedly heard confessions in Croatian, Italian, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, and English. Articles about the church often boasted that the church membership represented fifty-one of the fifty-two nationalities listed by the US Census Bureau.¹¹ Scott wanted to create more unity, to calm the tensions, in the diverse parish. Early on, he stated his goal to make Mary Star an American parish in both language and system.¹²

Scott had his work cut out for him, in part because his predecessors had taken a different tack. In the early decades of the century, San Pedro was a Mecca for fishermen from all over the world. The waters off the coast were rich with abalone and sea bass, as well as numerous smaller fish. These fish stocks, along with the temperate climate and relatively unrestricted access to fishing, attracted large numbers of immigrants from

¹⁰ “Pastor Calls San Pedro ‘God’s Country—Special’,” *San Pedro News Pilot*, circa 1975.

¹¹ Cited in Vita, 50.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27.

Japan,¹³ Scandinavia, Italy, Portugal, and Croatia. Mary Star's earlier pastors responded to the influx of diverse immigrants by encouraging the establishment of separate social and religious organizations within the parish. This allowed various groups to gather together, speak their own languages, and devote themselves to patron saints from their native lands. These organizations were frequently divided along gender lines as well. Some examples of early sodalities still in existence include: the Altar Society, founded in 1889, to care for linens, vestments, and clean the sanctuary; Saint Anne's Society, founded in 1929, "for Italian Ladies" (but soon expanded to include those of Italian descent); and the Velike Gospel Society, for Slovenian women, established in 1932. These groups served many of the functions that ethnic parishes accomplished in other parts of the country.¹⁴ They offered social support and spaces where immigrants could speak their own language and find relief from the constant stress of adjusting to so much

¹³ Among the earliest groups of fishermen were a colony of Japanese, who lived since 1903 in an enclave on what is now called Terminal Island. While the Japanese immigrants had little to do with Mary Star of the Sea, many credit them with teaching other immigrant fishermen how to fish in commercial quantities. Some claim that the Japanese had the best fishing techniques, which they soon taught to the Portuguese, Italian, and Slav immigrants. According to the *Shoreline*, a publication of the San Pedro Bay Historical Society, the Japanese are credited with the introduction of brail-net fishing and the use of hand-net fishing for albacore. Bartlett, 36. Because of this reputation for fishing skills, early canning and packing companies such as South Coast Canning Company built apartment houses for the Japanese fishermen on the island. By the 1930's, the area on Terminal Island known as East San Pedro had become a thriving Japanese community. Zangs, 17. This all changed at the start of World War II, when all of the three thousand Japanese residents were evacuated and sent to detainment camps. Their homes were razed to make room for military operations, and very few of the detained Japanese fishermen ever returned. Zangs, 23. Also see Richard R. Perkins, "The Terminal Island Japanese: Preservation of a Lost Community" (Master's Thesis, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 1992). For a detailed description of the early Japanese community, based on questionnaires and oral history interviews, see Kanichi Kawasaki, "The Japanese Community of East San Pedro, Terminal Island, California" (Master of Arts Thesis, University of Southern California, 1931).

¹⁴ Jay P. Dolan, *The America Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1985), 158-220.

change. These organizations also addressed the physical and material needs of immigrants through charitable activities and the pooling of resources for mutual aid.

Scott's predecessor, Father James McLaughlin, had continued to encourage the pattern of ethnic organizations. During his tenure, from 1934-46, the number of parish organizations increased to twenty-seven. Additionally, he arranged for missions to be preached each year in English, Italian, Slavonian, and Spanish, "for the various national elements of the parish then still quite divided."¹⁵ At least some of the ethnic division in the church was related to competition among the fishermen from various countries. The competition between Italian and Slav fishermen is well-known. One informant tells me that there were times when fishermen from these groups would wake up early, ready to leave the shore in their boats, only to discover large holes in their nets, caused by acid that their competitors had applied during the night.¹⁶ Older members of the church also recall the days when ethnic groups worshipped separately, at their own Masses, in their own pews, refusing to speak to each other. For pastors trying to retain the various immigrants in one parish, there may have been little choice but to allow for separate Masses and devotions.

Monsignor Scott, the church's first American-born pastor, searched for ways to bring the groups together. His approach was in keeping with the popular post-war rhetoric of the melting pot. He is quoted as saying that it occurred to him that there was

¹⁵ Vita, 25.

¹⁶ Informational interview # 04.

one word that all the groups in the church understood—Fiesta.¹⁷ Even as the town was busy organizing its first Fishermen's Fiesta, Scott called for the church to establish an annual fund-raiser: Mary Star's own Annual Parish Barbecue and Fiesta. This church-wide celebration, in which each of the separate organizations established booths, sold ethnic foods, and organized games and contests, had the effect of bringing the various groups into closer proximity as they worked for the common goal of expanding church facilities and programs.

But Scott's repertoire of strategies for establishing ethnic unity included a more startling tactic. The church's Sixty Years Commemorative Booklet includes an undated picture of a minstrel show. The book claims that Father Scott encouraged "the founding of a Parish Minstrel Group to produce and stage an authentic minstrel show each year." It further claims that both the parish Fiesta and the minstrel shows "were intended to weld the various national groups and their descendants together for the general benefit of the parish."¹⁸ It is not clear from the available parish records how many years these parish minstrel shows were held. Yet these performances, with the stated intention of bringing ethnic Catholics together, bring to mind what Robert Orsi has called a "strategy of alterity," whereby Italian (and other European) immigrants reconstituted themselves as Americans when assimilation seemed necessary for success.¹⁹ This self-constitution

¹⁷ "Angel's Gate Salutes . . ." Angel's Gate Council, No. 1740, Knights of Columbus, circa 1975.

¹⁸ Vita, 27-28.

¹⁹ Robert A. Orsi, "The Religious Boundaries of an Inbetween People: Street *Feste* and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned Other in Italian Harlem, 1920-1990," *American Quarterly* 44 (Sept. 1992): 313-47. Also see James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (Spring 1997): 3-45.

involved using alterity—that is, establishing a perceptual distance (a sense of “not-me”) in relation to darker-skinned neighbors who had lower status and/or who, as in the case of the Japanese on Terminal Island, were believed to be less than full American citizens.²⁰ Historically in America, minstrelsy employed distorted images of African Americans to function as the “other,” over against whom diverse European immigrants could join together and identify themselves as primarily (white) Americans.²¹ The process of Americanization that Scott championed in the church appears to have included the use of minstrelsy and, we might infer, at least some elements of the strategy of alterity or “becoming white.”²²

In 1949, when Mary Star celebrated its sixtieth anniversary, the church’s historians wrote, “In scarcely two generations the melting pot of Catholicism and Americanism has done its beneficent work.”²³ Even if we leave aside the important question of who was left out of this “beneficent” melting pot, this was probably an optimistic assessment of the church’s progress on ethnic harmony within its own ranks. Nonetheless, these were prosperous and upbeat times for fishermen and for the church.

²⁰ According to one of my historical consultants, World War II heightened these tensions and distinctions for Italians in San Pedro, because Italy’s role as an enemy in the war led to questions about Italian immigrants’ patriotism. Italians in San Pedro were said to “lay low” during the war, trying not to draw attention to themselves, having witnessed the fate of their Japanese neighbors. Personal conversation with volunteer at San Pedro Bay Historical Society, 28 March 2000.

²¹ For a historical interpretation of the phenomena of blackface and minstrelsy in America, see David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), esp. chapters 5 and 6.

²² For a broad description of the history of whiteness in America, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 26. For a fascinating theological interpretation of the process of becoming white, see Thandeka, *Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God in America* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

²³ Vita, 33.

The success of the growing church brought pride and a qualified sense of unity to the parish. Both the melting pot ethos and the mood of prosperity of this period found expression in what was to become an extremely popular San Pedro tradition, the Fishermen's Fiesta.

The Fishermen's Fiesta

The Fishermen's Fiesta is the San Pedro institution that represents more than any other the overlap between the heyday of the fishing industry and the glory days of Mary Star of the Sea parish. Established in 1946, the traditional celebration combined a secular civic event with Catholic religious ritual. Many of the older persons I interviewed remembered the Fiesta fondly: some showed me pictures and spoke proudly of winning awards for their boats' decor. They expressed nostalgia for the days when the wharf was a safe place to go. As I listened to my interviewees describing these events, I had a sense that their devotion to God, their love of country (America), their fondness for their Italian heritage, and their love for Mary Star of the Sea church were blurring together in glorious harmony.

The Port of Los Angeles Fishermen's Fiesta was initiated in 1946, as a victory celebration marking the end of the war. Numerous unions and local business associations joined to gather to stage the celebration. These included the Fishermen's Cooperative Association, the San Pedro Chamber of Commerce, the Federated Boat Owners Association, the Seine and Line Fishermen's Union, and the International Fishermen and

Allied Workers of America, Local 33. The colorful dockside festivities were repeated in 1947, and then halted for a year for the construction of new docks.²⁴

Before the celebration resumed in September of 1949, Monsignor George Scott received an invitation from the Fishermen's Fiesta Committee asking him to arrange for the Archbishop of Los Angeles to come to the event and give his blessing to the entire fleet.²⁵ This invitation is striking in that it offered a visible and prominent role to the Catholic church's local leader, signifying perhaps that here, in San Pedro, the Catholic church had attained the fully American status that George Scott valued so highly. Thereafter, the Fisherman's Fiesta featured an annual Blessing of the Fleet. Photographs and news articles covering the Fiestas of this era show long street processions of Catholic clergy, altar boys, and the faithful carrying lighted liturgical candles down to the wharf, while crowds of people line the streets.²⁶ Down at the wharf, movie stars, mayors, and Catholic Cardinals rubbed elbows as they piled on and off the boats. The Fiesta remained a civic celebration, sponsored by the San Pedro Chamber of Commerce from 1949-1957, with additional financial support from Los Angeles County and the LA Harbor department beginning in 1954. At the same time, this wildly popular event, which in 1951 rivaled the Rose Bowl parade in attendance, continued to feature the Catholic Church, giving it a special place in the celebration through the Blessing of the Fleets. At least to some extent, this signals the success of the largely immigrant parish in winning a

²⁴ Unidentified photocopy of "History of the Fishermen's Fiesta," 9.

²⁵ Vita, 29.

²⁶ The practice of liturgical street processions probably recalled religious processions in Ischia, Sicily, and other parts of Southern Italy.

place in the “sacred space” of the patriotic public ritual, thereby asserting its presence and influence in San Pedro.²⁷ The presence and influence of the church’s largest two immigrant constituents—Slavs and Italians—were implicit in this victory.

Mary Star parishioners were active on the Fiesta Committees, and participated in the tradition with pride. The Fiesta grew to become a three-day event, featuring, among other things, a beauty contest for an annual Fiesta Queen. The prize for the winner was an authentic Hollywood audition for an acting part in a movie. There were also contests for decorating the boats with colorful flowers and flags, arranged to represent pictures with religious or popular themes. There were net-sewing contests, to see who could tie knots and mend nets the fastest. Many of my interviewees remembered their family boats being decorated and entered, and some won prizes. Monsignor Scott saw the fundraising potential in this event, and encouraged the various organizations within the church to set up shop at the wharf. Ethnic food was plentiful at these booths, which featured a variety of seafood. Interviewees who were teenagers during the Fiesta days offer vague recollections of eating lasagna on the boats. *Cioppino*—an Italian bouillabaisse or fish soup—was also served up in abundance. One woman recalls setting up a booth to sell “Holy Mackerel”—fried mackerel—to visitors. The Fiestas celebrated the prosperity of the fishing industry in ways that were simultaneously Catholic, ethnic, and American, with a bit of Hollywood-style celebrity and fanfare thrown in.

²⁷ David Chidester and Edward Linenthal write, “In its material production and practical reproduction, sacred space anchors a worldview in the world.” Introduction, *American Sacred Space*, 12.

While the Fisherman's Fiesta illustrates the boom times for San Pedro fishermen as well as Mary Star parish, there is still a subtext of hardship and loss for many of the persons I interviewed about their early experiences of fishing in San Pedro. We can get a better sense of this if we focus on the workers—the fishermen who were crew members rather than boat owners; and the women and men who worked in the canneries. Crew members and cannery workers made modest though somewhat predictable wages during the heyday of fishing. They lived in inexpensive houses below Pacific Avenue,²⁸ within walking distance to the wharf and the ferries that transported cannery workers to Terminal Island. Some lived in homes right on the coast, on property that was to become valuable much later. But even during good times, fishing and canning were difficult and dangerous occupations.

The Fishing Life: Realities for Workers

While the smell of tuna cooking was an indication of prosperity, the smell of raw fish that cannery workers regularly absorbed and endured is reported to be especially foul. One informant cringed with the memory and told me, "You could smell it on buses, at banks, everywhere."²⁹ The advent of unions between 1930-1950 also suggests that the working conditions and wages of cannery workers were less than ideal. A stanza from a poem written by a female fish packer who worked in a San Diego branch of the Van de Camp Company gives us an idea of what this occupation was like:

²⁸ Pacific Avenue is a main thoroughfare in San Pedro that runs perpendicular to the shoreline, five blocks inland.

²⁹ Informational interview #01.

It is cold in a cannery and wet,
 Salt wind blows through,
 And the feet freeze fast to the
 slimed and rotted floor,
 And the fingers grow stiff on the knife,
 numb, jointless, and sore,
 Cutting the heads and guts from the little sardines as they pour
 Out of the chutes that is always
 belching sardines, always more, always more.³⁰

These harsh odors and cold and hazardous working conditions may be related to the reasons that some Italian men preferred that their wives not work in the canneries.³¹

These jobs, however, were often filled by immigrant women, beginning with Japanese women before the war,³² and eventually including Mexican, Croatian, and Italian women, as well as men.

For reasons that are unclear, one of the immigrants I interviewed neglected to tell me that she had worked in a cannery. Her daughter later informed me of this, noting that for close to ten years, her mother would get up and walk to Beacon Street, where she and the other women workers waited for the 4:00 a.m. ferry to Terminal Island. While it was considered dangerous for women to gather there in the dark, the ferry was the only available means of transportation at the time.³³ The cannery worker's daughter recalls the ubiquitous smell of fish: mackerel, anchovies, and "red devils"—a kind of scorpion used

³⁰ Edith Summers Kelly, "The Head Cutters," in Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 126, citing *Kelly File*, Carton 4, Carey McWilliams Collection, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, Calif. Used by permission.

³¹ This generalization is taken from an informational interview.

³² The Japanese women were called "tuna nurses" because they wore crisp white hats to work.

³³ The Vincent Thomas Bridge had not yet been built.

in soup.³⁴ Several other persons I interviewed told me of mothers or aunts who worked at the canneries intermittently from the 1930s through the 1950s. They did this routinely to supplement family income when their fishermen husbands were injured, or when their boats were being repaired, or when they were enduring a period of dwindling prices or elusive fish stocks. Some women found social support and connection in these jobs, as well as needed income.³⁵

Canetti's Seafood Grotto

I learned a great deal about both canning and fishing through the kindness of "Papa Joe" Canetti, a local restaurateur. At Canetti's Seafood Grotto, a waterfront establishment that has served as a gathering ground for fishermen, gill-netters, longshoremen, international crews, fish-buyers, and yacht owners since 1949, stories of both hardship and glory can still be heard. One can also find evidence of these fish tales on the walls of the restaurant, which feature old photos of tuna seiners, overloaded sardine catches, and popular Fishermen's Fiestas. From the early 1950s, when 125 purse seiners routinely went off to sea, to the present when no more than twenty-five boats go out, Canetti's has been a haven for fishermen. In an interview for a 1998 article in *National Fisherman* magazine, Canetti recalls a time when a group of fishermen in their purse seiners unexpectedly found a school of giant bluefish tuna near Santa Rosa Island, a windfall of significant proportion. "There were guys comin' in here after making million-dollar sets, sets where crewmen earned fifteen thousand dollars apiece. When that

³⁴ Interview #16.

³⁵ Interview #24.

happened, this place turned into a giant party. I've never served a happier bunch of fishermen."³⁶ Occasions like this were a rarity, but they illustrate the extreme height of abundance that fishermen could anticipate on an expedition. Hopes for such good fortune were high, especially in the early days, before, as one fisherman put it, "things went bad."³⁷

It is hard to date precisely the downturn of the fishing industry in San Pedro. The man who spoke of things going bad fished only from 1946 until 1952, before he switched to another occupation. The waning popularity of Fisherman's Fiestas, notable since 1967, is sometimes also pointed to as an indication of the end of the boon.³⁸ When I ask the locals what caused the downturn, I'm usually told that the industry simply "fished out the bay." As early as the fifties, I'm told, tuna could no longer be found close to the shore. Local fishermen were gradually forced to go out further into the ocean to fish, which meant staying away from home longer, usually a week or more. Similarly, sardines, which once attracted scores of Norwegian fishermen from the state of Washington every June, had disappeared. The canneries gradually disappeared as well, with only two remaining.³⁹

³⁶ Mick Kronman, "Breakfast at Canetti's." *National Fisherman*, July 1998, 26.

³⁷ Interview #8.

³⁸ Interview #8.

³⁹ In 1991 Mary Zangs wrote, "There were 17 canneries in the 1930's thru 1950's. That number dwindled down to seven canneries in 1972. In 1975, only Pan Pacific, Star-Kist, and Van Camp remained. Van Camp Seafood Company, which canned tuna under the brand names of Chicken of the Sea and White Star, had come under ownership of Ralston Purina. It moved to San Diego in 1976 and Pan Pacific took over its Terminal Island plant. By 1983, tuna canneries moved most production from Southern California to American Samoa and Puerto Rico. Star-Kist, now owned by H. J. Heinz, closed its Terminal Island tuna cannery in October 1984, though it still has a mackerel pet-food operation here. In 1987, the local

Changing national and international laws over the years have brought restrictions on local fishing as well as unprecedented competition. Canetti cites as an example the restrictions on local sea bass, which now can be fished for only two or three months per year. In the meantime, tuna have been moving south and out into deeper waters, where the United States does not have complete jurisdiction, and where local fishermen must compete with large-scale international fishing vessels. Locals have also had to obtain additional licenses to fish in these waters, or risk being caught and fined, or worse. Newspaper clippings from the 1970s and early 1980s report on the “tuna wars” that erupted after the governments of Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru started seizing and fining unlicensed American fishing vessels found within two hundred miles of their coasts.⁴⁰ Fishermen from San Pedro who opted to take their chances and forgo purchasing the expensive licenses (such as \$26,000 in Ecuador alone), would be arrested, fined heavily, and sometimes detained—thereby losing valuable fishing time. The United States government got involved in these disputes, but didn’t succeed in stopping the seizures. Eventually the government set up a fund to help American fishermen who sustained heavy losses due to these seizures. But the fund started running out of money in 1980, leaving many fishermen and the industry to absorb their own losses. By this time, the downturn in American tuna fishing was indisputable.⁴¹ It is not surprising that in the last

Fisherman’s Cooperative Association, which runs a fleet out of Fisherman’s Slip, took over the Star-Kist plant #1, calling their endeavor United Food Processors, Inc.” Zangs, 29.

⁴⁰ “Ecuador Captures Eight Tuna Boats,” *San Pedro News Pilot*, 14 Nov. 1972, A1; M. J. Lagies, “The Two Sides to the Ecuador Tunaboat Seizures,” *San Pedro News Pilot*, 15 March 1975, A1; John Davies, “U.S. Runs out of Money to Reimburse Fishermen,” *San Pedro News Pilot*, 18 Nov. 1980, A1, B1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

thirty years, numerous small boats have been retired. These boats occupy a small strip of the harbor that one local referred to as “starvation row”⁴²(see Figure 30).

“Pescatore Desparate”

In 1988 the Corporation for Public Broadcasting filmed a segment of a nationwide documentary film series, entitled “Listening at the Luncheonette,” at Canetti’s. The segment was called “*Pescatore Desparate*,” or “Despairing Fishermen.” In the documentary, the narrator allows the “regulars” at Canetti’s to speak casually to each other, with little interruption. The patrons in the restaurant openly describe the painful collapse of fishing in San Pedro. One of the principals volunteers, “You know what to call this film? Call it ‘Despairing Fishermen,’ ‘cause there’s no happiness here.”⁴³

In the documentary, one man laments the closing of the canneries, which he blames for the drop in prices. He speaks angrily to a market owner, also a regular: “Why aren’t we getting a price? When the canneries were here, we never had any problems. We always had a price. But now we’re working for you guys.” “Go cry in church!” replies the market owner, in a sarcastic reference to the devotion of fishermen. The first man apparently ignores this sarcasm, and goes on with his lament. “I worked for thirty years in that cannery. A thousand women cleaning fish at a time. Look at all the economy going down the tubes. A thousand women all dressed up like nurses⁴⁴ going into those canneries, singing at Christmas . . . It’s broken now.” A sense of depression

⁴² Informational Interview #01.

⁴³ “Pescatore Desparate--Despairing Fishermen.” Episode 101 in *Listening at the Luncheonette*. PBS. filmed at Canetti’s Seafood Grotto, San Pedro, Calif., 1988.

⁴⁴ “All dressed up like nurses” is a reference to their white hats.

dominates the film. Men worry that their grandchildren will have no work. They complain about laws that protect endangered species at the expense of fishermen: "Now when you bring in the fish, there's only two left, because there's eighty billion seals out there, and they bite the net. The seal goes along the net and takes the bellies off. You come in, and you've made a hundred dollars for a whole month's work." The talk turns to prices, and one man blames political corruption in Washington. Another argues that the United States prices were so much higher than the rest of the world that "we got to come down if they're coming up." Still another claims that some good things have come out of the loss of work. "We've got to learn to get back to community. One of the nice things about working less is you have more time. If you can make the transition back to just having enough, that is."⁴⁵ This attempt at meaning-making is not picked up by others.

In spite of this dispirited conversation, there are some joyful moments in the recorded hour. One comes when an international fisherman plays his guitar and improvises a song about fishing. Another comes when a woman speaks of her love for San Pedro, the sight of the ocean, and her feeling of belonging in this place. More smiles emerge when one of the well-known locals, with the help of his wife, describes one of his best nights of fishing. His wife begins the story: "It was on a Friday night after supper. John (her husband) calls at 6:00 o'clock. His usual helper couldn't come. I offer to go in

⁴⁵ "Pescatore Desperate--Despairing Fishermen."

his place. Once we're out there on the water, he was grumbling. He says, 'We're late.

We're not going to get our spot," then, 'Okay, let's put the net in the water.'"

The man picks up the story from here:

It was a beautiful evening. The ocean looked like glass . . . wonderful warm water. About ten o'clock we start pullin' and here come the sea bass! We got to relax. There was no breeze. It was wonderful, warm weather. The fish were glimmering in the moonlight; . . . one, two, three, four of 'em. Just in big bunches. You could just see them off in the water shimmering because of the moonlight. That night we had over one hundred sea bass. It was one of my best nights ever.⁴⁶

As the couple tells this story, they are glowing. I gain the impression that even an occasional night of fishing marked by this kind of exquisite beauty and good fortune can keep a fisherman going for some time. Perhaps it is the hope for this kind of beauty and bounty that motivates many fishermen to endure the numerous hardships that their occupation entails.

Separation from Families

Along with the strain of economic loss, fishermen in San Pedro have had to endure frequent separations from their families. As the conversation above indicates, the length of fishing trips gradually increased as the fish moved out of the bay and as competition and regulation in the industry increased. These separations from family and friends have been marked by both hopes and fears. One woman I interviewed, whose brothers-in-law were fishermen, remembers the worry in her sisters' faces. She points out that not all fishermen owned boats, and not all were prosperous. Sometimes the men

⁴⁶ Ibid.

would go out for a week and come back with nothing.⁴⁷ The uncertainty of income, as well as the uncertainty about the safety of the men, had an impact on the lives of both fishermen and their families.

During these separations, many mothers functioned in effect as single parents, running their households and raising their children alone. One woman told me that her husband was away when she had her baby.⁴⁸ These extended separations led to closer reliance among extended family members as well as neighbors and friends. As one woman put it, "Hillary [Clinton] talks about 'the village.' Well, we had a village a long time ago. We needed a village! We took care of each other's children. If a child was hurt, my mother would carry him inside or bring him to the doctor if need be. We helped each other in those days." Some interviewees report that relatives moved in to live together during these times as well.

When mothers were also working outside the home, live-in grandmothers played a larger role in raising children. Two third-generation sisters that I interviewed explained that they were, in essence, raised by their grandmother. They credit her with teaching them to speak Italian, as well as passing on her devotions to the saints. "She kept us in line," one granddaughter claimed. She described her grandmother as a very strong woman, who taught them how to be strong, how to pray, and to trust that everything would eventually be okay.⁴⁹ When I asked one of these daughters whether she worried as

⁴⁷ Interview #16.

⁴⁸ Interview #17.

⁴⁹ Interview #19.

a child, when her father was away, she replied, "My grandmother wouldn't let us get worried. She cheered us up. Distracted us. She told us about the saints." I pressed the question, "But did you worry about your dad?" She answered, "My grandmother wouldn't let you know how worried you were."⁵⁰ This answer wonderfully conveys both how worried families really were about losing their loved ones at sea, and how efficiently they used their faith and devotional practices to counteract those fears. This grandmother was determined to banish any thought of fear in her grandchildren before it could set in. Nevertheless, the children were at times fearful, even if their grandmother quickly (and anxiously?) distracted them with stories of the saints. We can even wonder whether these inadmissible fears became embodied or stored as memories in their devotional practices.

Other children of fishermen were profoundly affected by separations from their fathers. One third-generation woman I interviewed told me of her father being gone most of the time, and how much of a disciplinarian her mother became. She is now especially determined to make sure her husband is present in her sons' lives. She also told me of her husband's memories of his father being gone for long periods. Because his father sometimes went to Alaska to fish for salmon, he was gone for up to seven months at a time. The child used to cry inconsolably for his father. His mother, an extremely devout immigrant who spoke little English, must have also endured considerable stress.⁵¹

Carmela, a thirty-four year-old member of the second generation, remembers praying for her father's safety from the time that she was very young. Before he left on a

⁵⁰ Interview #13.

⁵¹ Interview #25.

fishing trip, her father would send Carmela or one of her siblings to the church to get holy water, so they could sprinkle it on the net. She remembers that he always had a cross and a statue of a saint on board to protect him. She also describes her role as teenager in the Mass at Mary Star preceding the Fishermen's Fiesta: at the offertory Carmela would bring a boat and a piece of net up to the altar. Then she would do the scripture reading. These seem to be pleasant memories for Carmela, perhaps because she had a role to play in her father's leave-taking rituals. Maybe sprinkling holy water on the net was fun for her and her siblings. Her later role in the fishermen's Mass may have helped her glean a sense that she as a fisherman's daughter was seen and cared for by God, the clergy, and/or the gathered community. Carmela also spoke of the concern she felt even as a child praying that God would bring her father home safely. She sometimes found herself thinking of what it would be like if he never came home. She said, "When he would walk through the door, there was a sigh of relief."⁵²

Even into adulthood, Carmela's prayers and concern for her father have continued. She tells the story of her father's boat going down recently, less than a year ago. He was part-owner of the vessel, which was fishing just off the coast of Monterey. It was a seventy-five foot commercial fishing boat, with a crew of nine on board. When the boat became overloaded and sank, the Coast Guard came to the rescue of the crew. Carmela sounds upset as she recalls the incident. "They hit the water. He's a large man.

⁵² Interview #22.

It took them a long time to get him up.”⁵³ Carmela’s concern for her father is palpable. I get the impression that she has gone through the cycle of prayer and worry many times, and it has never been easy.⁵⁴ Because Carmela has lost her mother to cancer, her concern for her father’s safety is all the more poignant.

These stories demonstrate how fishermen’s families have endured and coped with periods of separation from husbands, brothers, and fathers. Mothers and grandmothers left home raising children often relied on the practice of devotions, repeating the prayers of the rosary while holding the beads, or dipping their hands into cups of holy water. The devotions, in part because of their use of tangible items, could include children in ritual activities that were impressive, intriguing, and perhaps sometimes fun. The camaraderie of extended families drawing together was probably a source of comfort and/or joy for some of these children, though others seem to remember mainly their own weeping or their mother’s escalated disciplinary practices. Whether children in this situation were “allowed” to be afraid or not, it seems apparent that they absorbed the anxiety of the situation, even as it was addressed or deflected, and sometimes ameliorated, through the practice of devotions.

Losses at Sea

After I had already completed several early interviews, I began to wonder about the number of losses at sea related to fishing. I began to ask people routinely whether there were any stories of boating or fishing accidents in their family history. Often, I was

⁵³ Ibid.

initially told, “No, not in our family,” or, “No, not that I am aware of.” This disclaimer was sometimes followed by a story of a friend’s family’s loss. Then a closer story of loss might be told, such as the story of an uncle’s uncle whose boat went down at sea. Finally, and often with much difficulty, stories of personal experiences of emergencies, accidents, and losses would emerge. Just as likely, one family member might fill me in on a story that another family member had omitted.

I do not think that the people I interviewed were being duplicitous with me in omitting or “forgetting” these stories. In many cases, as persons spoke to me, it seemed that there was no initial recollection of loss at all. When I asked the question, several people responded by describing the effectiveness of the Coast Guard, and suggested that deaths at sea now are a thing of the past. However, as our conversations proceeded, stories of recent as well as older catastrophes would emerge. I began to suspect that these stories were initially “forgotten” not because they were rare or distant memories, but because they were fairly commonplace and recent enough to be extremely frightening.

In one of my informational interviews, I consulted “Paul,” a seventy-year old businessman of the second immigrant generation, for his description of the local fishing scene. I listened eagerly as he offered many stories from his close connection to the fishing industry. He supplied me with stories and colorful details that others had omitted. When I asked him about accidents and the fear of fishing accidents, he praised the Coast Guard and dismissed the current danger of dying at sea. He then pointed to an employee

⁵⁴ This story also illustrates another dimension of the hardship of fishing: the increasing strain and risk that men face as they age in this occupation.

of his, and told me that her husband's boat was destroyed in a storm six months earlier, noting that the Coast Guard had saved the crew. He assured me that this was no big deal; a new boat was already under construction.

Paul then began speaking in hushed tones, as he related a story about his own experience in the water, an event that had taken place many years earlier. Paul told of going out on a skiff with a high school friend, when they were eighteen and nineteen years old. They were not far from shore when the sea became choppy, and one oar dropped. "I said, 'Hey, you want me to go get that oar?'" and my friend said, "No, Paul, I'll go." Then he swam out to get it, and he never came back." Paul was shaking visibly as he spoke. I asked him what happened then. He said he just stayed in the boat, screaming "like a madman." Eventually someone picked him up. The other boy's parents never spoke to him again. "I should have died. Not their son, I should have died," he repeated several times. Paul went on. "I'd be in a lock-up today if it wasn't for the priest. He took me places and helped me get back." Close to tears, Paul added, "It's always with me. It's right there."⁵⁵

It is my impression that a number of tragic losses at sea are "right there" beneath the surface of everyday life for many in San Pedro. The beauty of the ocean and its inspirational quality are celebrated by almost every one I interviewed. The fishermen's "live-for-today" bravado, celebrating the joys of the open air and the solitude of life at sea, is real. But this pleasure in the present is linked to an uncertainty about the future,

⁵⁵ Informational interview #05.

and to the painful knowledge that fishermen are engaged in one of the most dangerous occupations in the world.⁵⁶ While many fishermen and their families may try not to think about the risks, some awareness of the danger is unavoidable. One of the devout immigrants, whose fisherman husband was twice rescued from the Pacific Ocean, puts it this way: "I love the ocean. It's something very powerful. Because when it gets mad, it's very powerful. Nobody could stop it. Only God."⁵⁷

In the course of the thirty-one core interviews I conducted, no fewer than twenty different fishing accidents were reported to me. (Some accidents were reported to me by more than one person in a family, but I was careful not to count the same accident more than once.) This number is substantial, especially when we take into consideration people's reluctance to talk about these incidents and that I did not directly ask every person I interviewed about losses. These were serious incidents, where the vessels involved either overturned or sank. Frequently an overloaded hull was cited as the cause of these accidents: sometimes storms or explosions on the boats were noted. These accidents involved either the men I interviewed themselves, or the fathers, uncles, crew members, husbands, or more distant relatives of the persons I interviewed.

These twenty accidents resulted in eleven fatalities. In one additional case, a whole crew was said to have gone down. Given my small sample, these numbers are high. The effect of these losses on family and friends and churches is hard to estimate.

⁵⁶ Sebastian Junger reports that "More people are killed in fishing boats, per capita, than in any other job in the United States." Sebastian Junger, *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea* (New York: HarperTorch, 1997), 88.

⁵⁷ Interview #15.

Even in cases where the fishermen were rescued, the impact of the near-fatal experiences should not be underestimated. As Sebastian Junger's words suggest, the experience of almost dying remains with someone long after the storm subsides. My interviews indicate that these experiences remain as well with the wives, siblings, children, and friends who have feared their loved ones lost.

My research at the San Pedro Bay Historical Society further confirmed my hunch that serious fishing accidents continue to occur with some regularity in the waters off the bay. In a newspaper clipping file, I found reports of twenty-seven sunken boats in local waters between 1951 and 1991. In the majority of these cases, the captain and crew of the vessels were saved by rescue efforts. However, in some cases, there were fatalities, and in others, survivors told harrowing tales of their boats overturning in storms, catching fire, or exploding. Putting aside the devastating financial losses that these accidents involved, especially to uninsured boat owners, these incidents as reported seem extremely frightening. In one case in 1987, three crew members died, while six were saved in heavy seas after spending seventeen hours clinging to debris in the cold of night.⁵⁸ I suspect that experiences such as these stay with people, and make an impression also on local readers who learn of and absorb these stories with some regularity.

Paul's experience of excruciating emotional pain and terror at the loss of his friend from the boat they shared has clearly stayed with him for over fifty years. He recalls it as though it were yesterday. Similarly, the sudden losses of friends and family

⁵⁸ Susan Pack. "3 Die, 6 Saved in Boat Sinking." *San Pedro News-Pilot*, 17 December, 1987. A1.

members in accidents at sea, and the fear of such losses, inhabit the consciousness and prayer lives of many of those I interviewed. In addition to the trauma of any sudden loss, Paul exhibits a sense of survival guilt, evidenced by his sense that he should have been the one who died. Survival guilt is one of the more painful emotions that I witnessed when talking with people about these accidents.

Another family very haltingly shared a story involving similar emotions. Only by interviewing several family members was I able to piece the story together. Some years ago, two devout immigrants, a woman and her brother, owned a boat together. It was a small fishing vessel, named after their patron saint in Sicily. One day, the woman's brother (and part-owner) was out fishing with a small crew. They caught too much squid, and the boat went over. The brother was saved, but one crew member, a 30-year-old immigrant, was lost. As one of the owner's daughters put it, "That family lost a husband, a son." A new boat was eventually purchased, and a new saint's name was given to it. But there is a palpable sadness, a sense of responsibility perhaps, or guilt, that comes through in cast-down eyes when members of the older generation tell the story.

The traumatic stress of these incidents, as well as survival guilt, compound the grief and mourning processes that survivors have endured. It is not surprising that Catholics would turn to their faith for pastoral support in the face of such losses. In Paul's case, though he has never considered himself very religious, he credits his priest with helping him adjust to life again in the aftermath of the traumatic event of his friend's drowning. Apparently the priest spent time with Paul, helping him endure some of the

intense fear that set in after the trauma. By offering him connection and a supportive presence, the priest probably helped Paul avoid a prolonged period of constriction after the trauma.⁵⁹ Given the amount of guilt Paul was feeling, and the reality that the other boy's family was blaming Paul for their loss, the priest's presence at Paul's side may have also helped him feel worthy enough to make his way back into society. Paul did not become devout, but he remains grateful.

While a sudden loss of life at sea does not automatically correlate with increased religious devotion, there does seem to be a tendency toward intensified prayer among those who were devout to begin with. The other family described above was already devout before the incident involving the loss of a crew member. While the couple I interviewed did not tell me specifically how they had come to terms with this incident, they indicated that they continued to feel some responsibility for it. Interestingly, I did not get the impression that the couple blamed God or faulted the saint for the loss of their crewman. The woman indicated that she sometimes wonders what she may have done to provoke the saints or cause "bad things" to happen. The woman in particular has remained intensely devoted to her saints and to Mary Star of the Sea, a church that seems uniquely fitting for her because of its historical ties to the fishing industry and its long traditions of care and prayer with others who have known similar sorrows. In the presence of the Madonna that cradles the tuna boat as if it were the Christ child, many of the devout have engaged in the work of grief. Here devout can commit their loved ones

⁵⁹Herman, 42-27.

to the care of God or the Madonna or any one of the pantheon of supernatural relatives. Here they may also find a way to experience themselves as held in loving arms as they live with the hopes and fears and losses that characterize the fishing life.

In some cases, people report that a brush with death has caused them to re-think the meaning and purpose of their lives. This tendency is illustrated by my interview with Lisa, a 44-year old member of the two-thirds generation (second generation by one parent, third by the other). Lisa is the only woman who shared a story of her own frightening experience at sea. Lisa and her husband both come from fishing families, and though they have chosen other occupations for most of the year, they own a boat in Alaska, which they use for salmon fishing in the summer. She reports that she and her husband were out in their boat in the chilly Alaskan waters one summer, when a nearby boat started taking on water. She and her husband lent a pump to the people on the other boat, radioed for help, and stayed near the other boat until the Coast Guard arrived. Lisa then tells of another experience, when the boat she was in took on water. She becomes more intense as she speaks. "It was a scary thought that I could die." I asked her how that experience has affected her. "What it does to you is it makes you realize that life is so precious. Life is a gift."⁶⁰ She then goes on to describe a brother-in-law who had a serious illness. "We look at my brother-in-law as if he's a gift." Lisa emphasizes how beautiful her children have become to her. She notices this especially when they are in the role of altar boys during the Italian Mass on Sunday nights, when she claims they look

⁶⁰ Interview #25.

like little angels. Lisa uses this experience to remind herself of what she values—her family tops the list—and to keep in check any impulses to complain about daily trials.

Another story illustrates the way in which personal losses seem to intensify devotions to the saints for some. “Philomena,” the very first woman I interviewed in San Pedro, was a 91-year old immigrant from Trapani, Sicily. She came from a family of fishermen: her father, grandfather, husband, and sons were all fishermen. She immigrated to this country in 1946, with her two sons, in order to join her husband, who had already come to San Pedro to fish. Philomena had graciously welcomed me into her living room for an interview on short notice. She is a woman who prays almost continuously. After she told me the story of her extensive daily devotions, I asked her if she had children. Philomena immediately began to weep, and pointed to a large black and white photograph of a fishing vessel displayed on her living-room wall. It turns out that her first son was killed in a fishing accident, as was her husband. One of Philomena’s friends pointed out to me that Philomena has continued to keep an old Italian custom of wearing black as an expression of her mourning, even now, more than forty years after her husband’s death. She prays for her husband and son daily, as she prays for all the dead. In fact, she prays the rosary and sings devotional songs in Italian almost continuously throughout the day.

When I think of the intensity of her devotion, it seems to me to be matched only by the intensity of her loss. At first I wondered if her prayer is what John Bowlby would

call “a defensive activity,”⁶¹ serving the function of diverting her attention from her loss—in effect, giving her something else to do. But Winnicott’s theory of the transitional realm is more to the point. Philomena’s devotions do not so much divert her attention from her losses, as they help her stay imaginatively connected to her son and husband. As she prays for loved ones, the strain of accepting the external reality of their deaths is tempered by her spiritual sense that they are still alive with God. Her separation from them is perhaps made more bearable when she experiences a sense of spiritual unity with them through prayer and song.

As I suggested above, even in cases where there has been no fatality, the experience of storms or other fishing accidents can be extremely frightening. While I was not able to get many of these accounts from the fishermen themselves, their wives frequently told me the stories. Sometimes, as in this case, their husbands were present in the room, and interrupted occasionally to add a word or make a correction. “Joy” is a devout immigrant who told me the story of her husband Mike’s two accidents at sea, in which he almost drowned. In one case, Mike was part of a crew fishing in waters a good deal south of San Pedro, when the boat encountered a hurricane. The boat went down, and Joy’s husband Mike was in the water for thirty-six hours. She reports that she was

⁶¹ Regarding defensive activities, Bowlby writes that “they give the impression, on the one hand, of being carried out under pressure and of absorbing an undue proportion of a person’s attention, time and energy, perhaps in the form of overwork, and, on the other, perhaps being undertaken by him in some way at the expense of his giving his attention, time and energy to something else. They seem thus to be not merely alternatives, but also to be playing a diversionary role; and this is probably what they do. For the more completely a person’s attention, time and energy are concentrated on one activity and on the information concerning it the more completely can information concerning another activity be excluded.” John Bowlby, *Loss: Sadness and Depression*, vol. 3 of *Attachment and Loss* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 66.

praying for them the whole time. Mike was rescued when a Japanese freighter came along, picked up the crew, and brought them to Panama.

A similar event some years later involved Mike fishing on a job for his uncle. This time the boat sank near Mexico. The crew stayed with the life raft, until they were rescued by a Chinese and Japanese ship. Joy recounts these stories as miracles, similar to other miracles in her life, such as the time she injured herself and needed surgery to live, and the time five years ago when she was able to overcome cancer. "I never give up," she claims. "I always have hope." She adds, "I help anybody who comes to my door." Joy's English is good, so she continually helps her friends with translation when they go to doctors, or to the welfare office, or shopping. She has helped other immigrants with forms and with studying for citizenship. "God rewards me," she claims. "All the saints and angels . . . anytime I need them, I call upon them and I know they help me." She understands the saints to be her intercessors. "The saints give me a lot of miracles. Saint Anthony—I prayed to give my husband back. He prayed to Jesus and the Virgin Mary. God sent this big ship." Joy also credits her husband's faith with his safe return: "His faith bring [*sic*] him back fishing."⁶²

Joy demonstrates the way in which many immigrant fishermen's wives have worked the risks of fishing into their faith systems. "My faith is really, really strong," says Joy. "Sometimes I can feel and see Jesus. I am very, very, Catholica." Joy practices her faith, relying on her prayers at home and at church, her Italian Bible reading, her

⁶² Interview #15.

numerous works of religious art in every room of her house, her large social network of church friends, and her participation in religious societies at Mary Star to help her get through the frightening times. Helping the people who come to her in need is part of her devotional practice. It is part of the bargain she has made with God, to do whatever is asked of her, in return for miraculous help when she needs it. I have no doubt that her kindness to me in granting me an interview was part of Joy's practice of faith. Perhaps on some level it is her fear of catastrophe that motivates her acts of kindness and the zeal with which she performs them. I suspect that through these practices, she gains some sense of personal control or empowerment, and the hope that she can please the saints and win their favor. Joy seems to embody her faith, to have taken it into her personality, so that it is automatic. She says, "Faith comes from your heart. From your brain and your heart. The way you're thinking towards God in your heart."⁶³

San Pietro Society and the Blessing of the Fleet

Joy, along with several others whose stories I have described thus far, is a member of the San Pietro Society. This organization, along with its annual feast-day celebration, the Blessing of the Fleet, memorializes the interrelationships between fishing and faith and the Italian Catholic presence at Mary Star of the Sea. The San Pietro Society, founded in 1996, is an offshoot of the local Italian American Club. Those who started it wanted to "bring the devotion of San Pietro to the Italian community and a patron to fishermen."⁶⁴ San Pietro, or Saint Peter, is thought of as the patron saint of fishermen, as

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Quoted from the program for the San Pietro Society Fundraising Dinner-Dance, 29 April 2000.

well as the patron saint of San Pedro. He is usually pictured holding a key, representing the keys of the kingdom that Jesus gave to his disciple Peter, who was himself a fisherman. A large mosaic on the exterior of the Eighth Street side of the Mary Star sanctuary depicts this scene (Figure 31).

The extreme joys and sorrows of the fishing life, as well as the fluctuating fortunes of the history of the industry, are currently expressed and memorialized in the Society's annual event, the Blessing of the Fleet. This ritual is held in late June, on the Saint's feast day. Though I was not able to attend one these events, I watched a videotape of the first one that the Society sponsored, in 1996. One of the women I interviewed, a founding member of the Society, showed me the videotape in her home. The video captures the start of the feast day at morning Mass at Mary Star of the Sea. For this Mass, a large statue of Saint Peter, usually housed at the Italian American Club, is brought to the church in an open car. It is carried in ceremoniously, with members of the local chapter of the Knights of Columbus standing on either side of the aisle, their swords drawn. The pastor blesses the statue, and proceeds to walk down the aisle, blessing the congregation and sprinkling holy water. The gospel reading includes Jesus' words to his disciples, "I will make you fishers of men." In the course of the Mass, prayers for those who have passed away at sea are offered. The recessional hymn, "America," recalls the patriotic origins of the old Fishermen's Fiestas.

After the Mass, the people process down 6th Street toward the Marina. A truck decorated with crepe paper pulling a trailer carrying the statue of Saint Peter follows

them. At the Marina, a noisy crowd of brightly dressed people awaits the arrival of the pastor. The founders of the devotion are wearing white gowns and brown sashes, and some of them have Hawaiian-style garlands of flowers around their necks. The children are dressed in Italian costumes, most of which were hand-sewn for the joyful occasion. When Monsignor Gallagher arrives, the statue of St. Peter is placed on a boat in the water. Standing on the wharf, the pastor prays that God will “bless these boats, and those who use them, for work and for pleasure. As the Lord calmed the Sea of Galilee, we commend these boats to his care. . . . May God protect them, and their equipment, and be with them. May Christ who calms the storm fill their nets, and bring us all to the harbor of peace and love.” As I watch this videotape with Maria (described in Chapter 2), I see that she is gently weeping. The Monsignor’s prayer touches her and seems to capture her prayers and the prayers of so many of her friends.

The theology of this ritual is enacted as well as spoken. The priest’s words claim God’s presence, protection, and provision, and invoke the values of peace and love. The ritual as a whole does these things too, through activities that express the community’s particular history and identity. The practice of walking down to the wharf recalls religious processions in Italian homelands as well as in the Fisherman’s Fiestas of old San Pedro. This may be a way of ritually re-establishing the community’s sense of identity, which is now constituted over and against the backdrop of dislocation, both in relation to national homelands and in relation to the fishing occupation. If Italians made their mark (found their place) in San Pedro through their involvement with fishing, the decline of

this occupation may represent a loss that is cultural as well as fiscal. In this ritual, the people go down to the water, place Saint Peter in the water, and the priest puts in the anchor, thereby sacralizing the sea, which has given the people life (and caused some deaths). In doing these things, the people ritually relive their dual history of immigration and occupation, celebrating it, blessing it, mourning its losses, and grieving the larger loss of this history. Supported by the pastor's presence, his caring words and sensitive use of scripture, the people hold onto their memories before letting them go, casting them upon the sea as if scattering loved one's ashes.

The priest's blessing is followed by a lively party on the Marina. Singer Tony De Bruno and his band entertain, singing mostly Italian songs. There is much food, animated conversation, and dancing, lasting well into the afternoon. It is a small-scale event, when compared to the original Fisherman's Fiestas, as it inevitably is. Everyone knows that fishing in San Pedro isn't what it used to be. Nevertheless, this is a celebration of the fishing life in San Pedro, the way it was and the way it is. In this feast-day celebration, the precarious nature of fishing in San Pedro is lifted up and addressed through scripture, ritual, and prayer. The losses that people have suffered are recalled. And finally, as the priest tosses an anchor into the sea, the intensity of it all is released, and transformed into dancing and celebration. In this way, the pastor and people re-enact their shared memories, interpret them as sacred story, and express their passionate will to live.

Conclusion

The fishing industry has left an indelible mark on the practice of Italian devotions at Mary Star of the Sea. The wealth that this industry once created has certainly enriched many members, and enabled the church itself to prosper and expand over the years. But the vicissitudes of the fishing life have included significant hardship and loss for many of the devout. Fishermen and cannery workers have always led difficult and dangerous lives. Many of them used their devotions to sustain themselves and their children through crises and losses. Through these prayers and rituals, the people have memorialized their way of life, held on to memories of loved ones lost, and found the spiritual strength to endure. Additionally, the devotions have functioned to provide the people social support and communal forms of pastoral care, involving practical aid as well as friendship and encouragement, and spiritual connections to the saints and deceased loved ones.

At Mary Star of the Sea, off in a far right corner of the sanctuary, is a statue of Saint Restituta. This statue was donated to commemorate a boat with the same name, a boat that went down in a fishing accident in the early 1940s. One of my interviewees tells me he is the nephew of the nephew of the man who drowned when the boat sank. This popular altar draws many of Mary Star's devout over to pray. This suggests that the statue of Saint Restituta memorializes not only the man who died and his boat, but also many others who have been lost to a similar fate. Though these stories are not easily told, they seem to be present for the devout and for the community, in the form of enduring

emotions that are regularly recalled and expressed through devotional practices that are both old and new.

The rise and fall of the fishing industry, along with the subtext of hardship and tragic loss of life at sea, is memorialized through the ongoing devotions of the people. The vibrancy of the current devotions is owing, in part, to the intensity of the experiences of loss and fear of loss that so many families of fishermen have endured. Members of the second and third immigrant generations have been influenced by this history, and by their elders' intensified practices of devotion in this context. The immigrants and their children and grandchildren have also gained a sense of connection to each other through shared memories of their experiences of fishing, fear, and faith.

Thus far we have seen how the story of Italian immigrants' devotional practices in San Pedro involves their history of fishing as well as their reliance on visual piety. But this story would not be complete without an explanation of another important dimension of the devotions—that of food. Food is, after all, the substance and goal of fishing. People fished, and some continue to fish, in order to eat, to survive. Their devotions, which celebrate survival, often do so through the preparation, consumption, and sharing of food. In this chapter, I noted the abundance of ethnic foods at both the early Fisherman's Fiestas and the contemporary Blessings of the Fleet. In the next chapter, I will turn to an exploration of the religious and social meanings of food in this setting.



Figure 30 - "Starvation Row." These few small fishing vessels occupy a portion of the harbor down near the wharf. No more than 25 of these boats are estimated to be in current operation.



Figure 31 - "San Pedro Pride." This lone vessel sits along the dock amidst seagulls in the section of the wharf that has been called "starvation row."

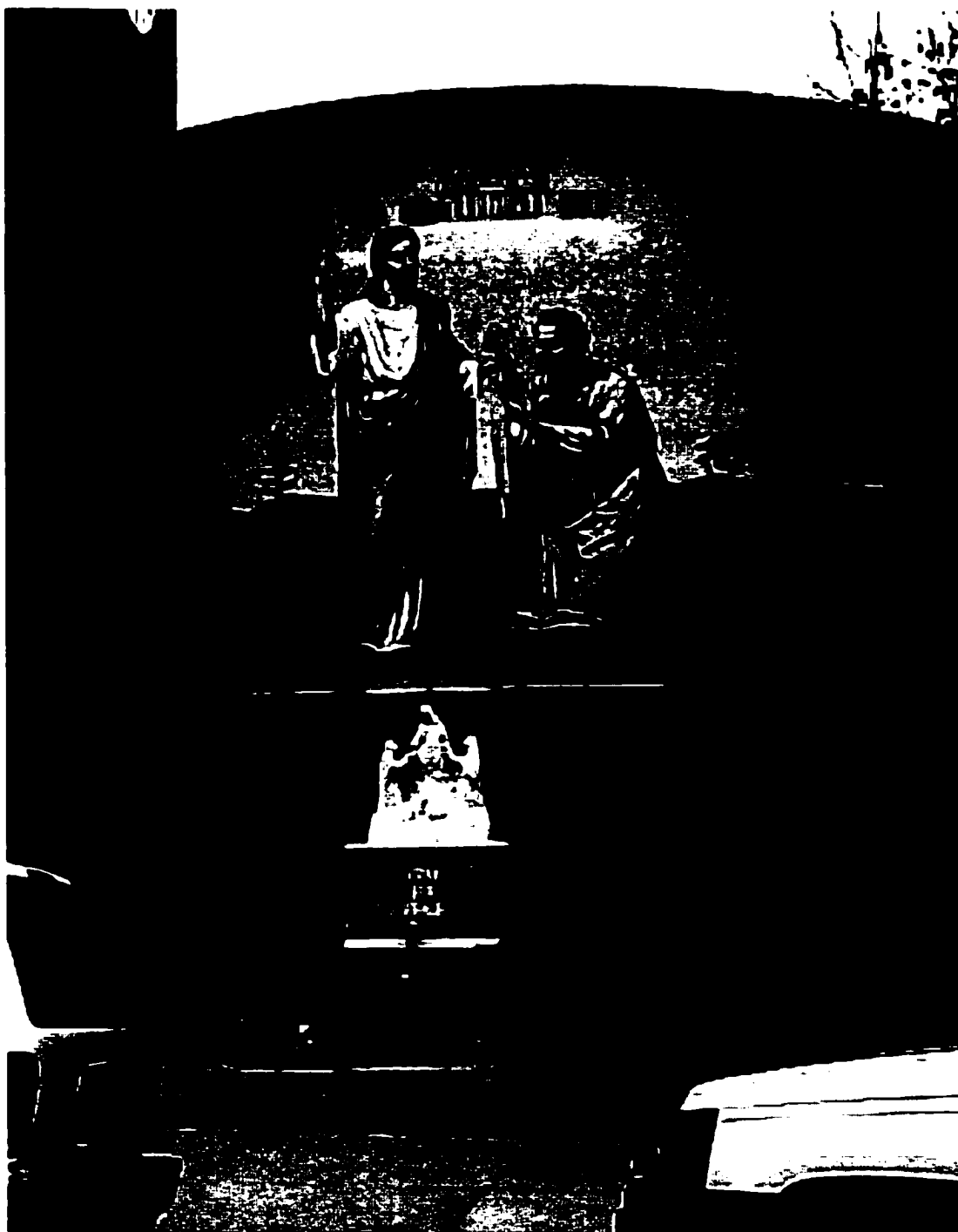


Figure 32 – This mosaic on the Eighth Street side of the church depicts Jesus giving Saint Peter the keys to the kingdom. Note the image of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in the "sky" behind the figures.

CHAPTER 4

Food, Famine, and Faith

“Viva, San Giuseppe, Viva!”

The date is March 19th, 2000. The celebration of Saint Joseph’s Table, an annual Sicilian tradition at Mary Star of the Sea Parish, is well under way. It began earlier with processions in the street before and after the 11:00 a.m. Mass. Approximately one thousand people filled the sanctuary for the Mass; less than that—perhaps five hundred—have gathered in the auditorium for the dinner and festivities that follow. A large U-shaped table is set up near the stage, at the feet of the statue of the saint. The table is elaborately decorated and completely covered with food. The host struggles to be heard over the noise. Shouts of *“Viva, San Giuseppe, Viva!”* inflected with a heavy Sicilian dialect, stir through the crowd, conveying an intense pitch of emotion.

Many things are happening at once in this room: bedecked members of the Knights of Columbus are posing for photographs around the light-studded statue of Saint Joseph; five elderly women wearing blue sashes identifying them as the founders of the devotion are seated off to the right side of the main table, praying the rosary; other members of the Saint Joseph’s Table Society are busy selling plates of homemade Italian cookies and raffle tickets, as well as glasses of beer, wine, and soda; meanwhile a sizable crowd of people, including my son and I, scramble for seats. At the center of it all is a large and ornately decorated table that is covered with food and dedicated to Saint Joseph (Figure 33 and Figure 34).

The food at this table is fresh, ripe, and choice. It displays the bounty of Southern California agriculture in springtime. Citrus fruits—lemons, grapefruits, and oranges—are particularly plentiful. They are arrayed in large overflowing baskets. Numerous vegetables including eggplant, cucumbers, huge artichokes, peppers, and cauliflower, are also carefully arranged on the table. They are interspersed with multiple loaves of fresh bread, which have been made in a diversity of shapes and sizes. Four particularly symbolic loaves of sesame bread are prominently placed near the feet of the Saint: one formed in the shape of a halo and one in a cross, signifying Jesus; one a staff, for Saint Joseph; and one a palm frond, signifying Mary (Figure 35). Additionally, there are overflowing bowls of raw mushrooms, carrots, tomatoes, lettuce, broccoli, radishes, cabbage, and cantaloupe. Nestled in among all of this are dishes of marzipan—a kind of candy made from almond paste—that has been intricately sculpted and painted into small replicas of carrots, figs, and strawberries. There are also numerous small cakes, baked and decorated to resemble stained glass windows, crosses, lambs, Easter eggs, shells, fish, and one shamrock (a bow to Saint Patrick, whose feast has just passed).¹ There are apples, grapes, plums, bananas, stalks of celery, nectarines, watermelons, and tall jars of uncooked pasta. Bowls of fennel, corn, beans, chestnuts, pineapple, pears, kiwi fruit, strawberries, and mangos alternate with plates of cookies, muffins, candy-covered almonds, braided sweet breads, and marshmallow chicks. A small dish of cooked fish—including sardines, anchovies, and crab—has been placed on each side of the U. Finally,

¹ The shamrock might also be interpreted as a bow to the Monsignor, an Irish immigrant.

and perhaps most imaginatively, there are three small plates of chocolate pieces, made in molds to resemble wrenches and hammers—Saint Joseph’s carpenter’s tools (Figure 36).

I am struck by the sheer abundance of the food on this table, its variety and zest, the boldness of its presentation. I think of the money spent on procuring the food, and the time invested in its careful arrangement. Obviously, many of the individual items hold particular symbolic meanings. But the overarching meaning that the table suggests to me is the sacrality of the food itself. The grand display of this bountiful substance proclaims its importance for life. This ritual reveals the community’s religious conviction that its life is a gift, as ripe and beautiful and perishable as every item on the table. “*Viva, San Giuseppe, Viva!*” asserts with rare candor a basic human yearning to eat well and stay alive.

Food in this setting can also be viewed as an expression of ethnic identity, of the Italian community’s will to proclaim and sustain its particular presence here in Los Angeles. Many of the foods displayed here recall the foods grown and consumed in Sicily, where this tradition began. In particular, the abundance of citrus, almonds, beans, bread, and fish reflect the Sicilian diet that many of the immigrants here remember. This helps explain the immigrants’ fondness for southern California, where so many kinds of fresh produce, particularly citrus fruit, grow. One immigrant stressed that she had never eaten meat when she lived in Sicily, as the people were all fishermen or farmers, and too poor to buy meat. I suspect that along with preserving ethnic identity, the devotion memorializes and redresses familial experiences of hunger and the struggle to survive.

Thus the gustatory bonds of memory, preserved in the body through tastes and textures and aromas, evoke both comfort and anxiety for the devout.

For the Italian immigrants, their children and grandchildren in San Pedro whom I interviewed and observed, the devotional bonds of faith are clearly connected to food. In this chapter, I will show how this connection is made and remade in at least three different kinds of practices: in communal rituals such as Saint Joseph's Table; in pastoral care ministries that have as their goal the feeding of the hungry; and in sharing meals as well as in other everyday interpersonal gatherings around family tables. This discussion raises issues of class and gender, and the labor involved in negotiating and maintaining ethnic identities. The interviews also suggest a connection between the Catholic practice of Holy Communion and the importance of food in a sacramental view of life.

While conducting my research in San Pedro, I found that abundant food, painstakingly prepared, was everywhere I went. The prominence and bounty of Saint Joseph's Table was replicated in various pastoral feeding ministries and in the ubiquitous presence of large and well-worn dining room or kitchen tables in the homes I visited. Like the braided loaves of sesame breads found on Saint Joseph's Table, the significance of food, survival, ethnic identity, and faith are braided together in the lives of the devout. Certain assumptions related to class and gender are revealed in these practices. While members of the later generations do not hold all the strands together in the same ways that their parents and grandparents did, the importance of food stands out as one of the most persistent dimensions of the Italian immigrants' faith worlds.

Saint Joseph's Table

According to tradition, Saint Joseph, the “stepfather of Jesus,” once saved the people of Sicily from a terrible drought. In response to the prayers of the starving people, Saint Joseph miraculously sent rain that made the crops grow overnight. In gratitude and in the hope of staving off future famines, several villages set up annual devotions to Saint Joseph, marking the mid-Lenten feast day of the Saint, March 19th. Traditionally, three of the poorest members of the village, a man, a woman, and a child (possibly an orphan) would be selected to play the roles of Joseph, Mary, and the boy Jesus. They would then enact a sacred drama, walking through the village and knocking at the doors of three homes, begging for food. This “holy family” would be refused at the first two homes they approached (recalling, of course, the plight of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter in Bethlehem). At the third door, marked by a palm frond or an olive branch, *I santi*, “the saints,” as they are called, would be welcomed and treated as honored guests. This home would be the pre-arranged location for the Saint Joseph’s table, which would have been lavishly prepared in advance. The three guests would eat first, sampling all of the finest foods, which would have been blessed by a priest and dedicated to Saint Joseph. After the honored guests were fed, the whole village would be offered a “poor man’s meal,” consisting of fava beans, pasta, sometimes sardines, and always bread and fruit. Afterwards, the honored guests were given the remainder of the blessed foods to take home with them.²

² Luisa Del Guidice, “St. Joseph’s Tables,” Exhibition Brochure (Los Angeles: Italian Oral History Institute, University of California, 18-19 March 1998).

The Saint Joseph's Table at Mary Star of the Sea Parish maintains several elements of this tradition, with the addition of a few interesting touches. Begun in 1973 by six women, themselves Sicilian immigrants, Saint Joseph's Society maintains a deep devotion to Saint Joseph year-round. But the feast day in March is clearly its largest and most time-consuming event. Permits for the procession must be obtained from government officials. The letter-writing process begins months in advance, in order to get the hefty fees for these permits waived. Extensive planning and purchasing also go on for months in advance of the feast. Hundreds of cookies are baked and frozen. Donations of flowers, bread, beverages, and food for the public dinner are tediously solicited from local merchants, as are items for the raffle that follows the dinner. A few key leaders of the devotion go around town to various businesses, seeking these donations. This practice of asking, or begging, is an important feature of the tradition. It is supposed to cultivate humility, which is believed to be particularly pleasing to the humble carpenter saint. But more than humility is needed to orchestrate this event. It is an organizing feat of serious proportions.

Some of this organizing takes place on the day before the Saint Joseph's Table feast, when about fifty core volunteers start gathering in the church auditorium to work on preparations. Food is the central focus of this day as well. Large scale cookie baking goes on in the morning. The women are in charge of the baking, but several men assist. The work is heavy and the kitchen gets hot. But the mood is upbeat: many old friends greet each other, and proudly display the cookies they have brought to contribute.

The day of preparation is marked by its own customary foods. When I arrived to observe, it was close to lunch hour, and the volunteers were just lining up for an elaborate lunch buffet. I was immediately encouraged to eat. A cold squid salad, Italian cold cuts, and exquisite homemade rolls were plentifully spread. The rolls had been baked that morning by one of the founders of the devotion. These particular rolls were not served at the dinner the next day: they were made expressly for the day of preparation. They were remarkably fresh, light, and flavorful. I complimented the woman who made them, wondering if she had passed this recipe along to anyone yet. She only smiled and encouraged me to eat more.

After lunch, a group of the devout gathered together, sitting on folding chairs, to pray the rosary and sing hymns to Saint Joseph in a Sicilian dialect. This prayer time seemed to flow naturally into the afternoon activities. It provided a period of physical rest, as well as spiritual activity for the oldest members of the Society. Different women took turns leading the decades of the rosary, and passing out small printed copies of the hymns. The prayers were familiar, and the women seemed to relax into a rhythm as they recited them. They were not just fulfilling a duty, but also earnestly engaged in prayer and song. The hymns brought tears to some eyes.

Meanwhile, some of the organizers kept working, albeit more quietly, in the kitchen nearby. Throughout the afternoon, hundreds of plates of cookies were wrapped for sale (Figure 37). I watched as the amount and variety of food at the Table grew to wild proportions. It seemed that everyone had a job there, or just knew what to do. The

praying, baking, socializing, singing, decorating, and eating seemed to flow together, as if in a pattern. Eating as well as prayer punctuated the day.

Later that evening, as the preparations continued into the dinner hour, a number of men arrived with Sicilian pizzas and salad for dinner. Again I was encouraged to eat. The longer I stayed, the more interesting the food and the rituals of preparation became. After dinner, I watched a group of women work in the church kitchen to prepare a chick-pea flour paste, which was quickly rolled out into a thin layer, cut into squares, and fried. I was of course encouraged to sample this *panelli*. The women worked deftly; meanwhile they were also laughing, posing for me to take their picture, and apparently enjoying themselves immensely. They spoke in Italian part of the time, and in English the rest. Around 9:00 p.m., as I was getting ready to leave, they heated up the griddle for yet another dish—*Cassadelli*. This is a sweet made from frying batter made of flour, eggs, wine, Crisco, and a little sugar shaped into a shell. The shell is then filled with a mixture of ricotta cheese, sugar, chocolate chips, and cinnamon. I was not allowed to leave that night without taking home a warm and heavy plate of these aromatic creations—“to taste.”

None of these particular foods were in evidence the next day, at the feast itself. Rather, these foods were reserved for the day of preparation and the inner circle of volunteers. The practice of preparing and sharing these additional foods is striking, especially on a day when the group had already been working steadily for over twelve hours to prepare the following day's food and festivities. What stood out for me in what I

observed that day was the camaraderie of the group, their pleasure in being there together, in speaking Italian, and in preparing and eating these special foods. The foods seemed to reinforce their bonds to each other, to Italy, and to their faith. The women made a point of telling me that the chickpea flour was imported from Italy; so were other ingredients that they had purchased at specialty markets in Los Angeles. The preparations were joyful, but also precise: it seemed important to get it right; the elders of the group were often consulted on matters of taste or consistency. This was, I think, a demonstration of respect for the older women, many of whom were too tired to keep working, but were nonetheless sitting nearby, enjoying themselves and their stature as the elders, the keepers of the tradition, and as expert consultants on the taste and quality of the food. That a good number of the group would pause in the midst of these preparations for an hour and half of praying and singing seemed perfectly natural. In the “faith world” that I entered that day, the spiritual and material aspects of devotion were clearly braided together.

Humility, Grandeur, and Class Roots

This annual event requires hard work, and some of the individuals who do most of it tend to wear themselves down. Their family members express concern over this to me. Nevertheless, as Anna, the main organizer, describes her role, she is smiling. She seems to exude a sense of satisfaction, finding fulfillment in pulling the event off successfully each year. The word “pride” comes to mind, but it is an odd kind of pride: a pride in one’s humility, in the behind-the-scenes quality of her work. Anna avoids public

recognition, and reserves the honorific roles—the front lines of the procession—for the founders, the elders who no longer actively manage the festivities.

This odd matching of humility and grandeur marks almost every aspect of the Saint Joseph's Table tradition at Mary Star. Each year, a young family from the church is selected to play the parts of Mary, Jesus, and Joseph. This is considered a great honor, often reserved for the founders' children and grandchildren.³ But of course, the actors recall Sicily's poorest persons. The little group leads the procession before the Mass, knocking on two doors in the church building complex, before finding a welcome from the pastor at the door to the Rectory. The pastor and several other priests then join the procession, which circles the church buildings between 7th and 8th Streets, wheeling along the large statue of Saint Joseph, decked out with red and white flowers (Figure 38). Numerous church societies fly their banners in the procession, including the Knights of Columbus, the Italian Catholic Federation, and Saint Anne's Society. A group of children dressed in traditional Italian costumes also walk along. An Italian marching band from Los Angeles brings up the rear, offering a variety of Italian and American anthems (Figure 39). As I followed them around the block with my camcorder, the procession seemed to be a combination of piety and parade: a celebration of things Italian, with a distinctly American flavor, and a hint of Hollywood as well.

³ This change is an example of the way in which the tradition is altered in its new location. While the poorest person in a Sicilian village might have been easy to locate and honored to play a role in the sacred drama, this is probably not the case in San Pedro. Here, the immigrants and their descendants play these parts themselves, and thereby slightly shift the emphasis of the symbolism toward immigration and ethnic identity.

Amidst all the fanfare and ethnic pride, however, the event retains a focus on devotion to Saint Joseph and his miraculous intervention to feed the poor. The table is a commemorative ceremony with many precise details that are repeated year after year, even if some new features, such as the band, are added. According to Paul Connerton, a calendrically observed ritual has a kind of “echo effect from the perceived order of a cosmic sequence.”⁴ The “echo effect” renders the past—or a certain memory of it—emotionally potent in the present. The words of Anna, the chief organizer of the Saint Joseph’s Table feast (who is also the daughter and niece of two of the founders) bore this out. In describing the feast day to me in advance, she said, “You will get goose-bumps.”⁵

There is indeed a moment in the ritual when emotions run high. It follows after the Mass and the second procession. The statue of Saint Joseph has been carted back into the auditorium, and placed at the head of the Table. The people press in to get a look at the food on the Table. Some pin money onto a sash attached to the statue (Figure 40). The founders, tired from walking, take their chairs near the table and begin praying. One of them, in her eighties, has walked the procession barefoot. It is at this point that someone tries with the aid of a microphone to address the crowd, and the shouts of “*Viva San Giuseppi!*” begin, creating an audible “echo effect.” The intensity of this moment, the feeling of “goose bumps,” has something to do with the belief that the Saint is still alive and present here, in the community of immigrants, with its venerable ancestors. The cries of “viva,” “live!” also carry, I think, the inverse emotion: the fear of annihilation, the

⁴ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 66.

⁵ Interview #7.

sense that, if it were not for the goodness of God, won by the intercession of Saint Joseph, we might not be here. Or maybe it is the people's fear that, without the continuing benevolent aid of the Saint in the present, even in this land full of plenty, some other disaster could befall them, and render them hungry again. Through this ritual, the Sicilian immigrants say to themselves as well as to others, "We are here!" Here, that is, in a country in which they still sometimes feel unsteady or out-of-place. Saint Joseph's Table feast is thus a kind of mirror, in which the immigrants can see themselves--alive, existing, thriving, here in this country--while also renewing emotional bonds to their former identities and practices.⁶

The emotional power of this event also lies in its bold reminder that people need food to live. Though the presentation of the food is stylized and the rituals around it are performative, there is still something disarmingly simple and direct about so much fresh produce. It is humble, in the original sense of the word: earthy. Again, we can note the juxtaposition of humility and grandeur. The cornucopia of food suggests lush abundance and plenty. Yet its raw form lays bare for the devout the reality of human dependence on the earth. Food comes from the earth; it is something that human beings cannot make. The bread, the most basic food here, is made of wheat; its production wholly depends on nature's power, God's power, to give rain or to take it away.

⁶ In a more general reflection on European immigrants' experience, Chidester and Linenthal write, "The old world was, in part, recreated in the midst of the new world. . . . Disorientation, dislocation, and alienation were imbedded in the immigrants' consciousness, try though they might to use their former identities as a buffer to soften the impact of their new condition." Chidester and Linenthal, Introduction, 26.

This presentation of food is humble in another way. Pierre Bourdieu, in his book *Distinction*,⁷ describes the food space as one field in which class differences are embodied and displayed. It seems to me that the food on Saint Joseph's Table, in its raw form, fairly announces its material reality, its substance. This primacy of substance reveals the concerns of the working class. By contrast, Bourdieu claims, the bourgeoisie is more concerned with form than function. Speaking of bourgeois dining habits, he writes,

It is also a whole relationship to animal nature, to primary needs and the populace who indulge them without restraint; it is a way of denying the meaning and primary function of consumption, which are essentially common, by making the meal a social ceremony, an affirmation of ethical tone and aesthetic refinement. . . . The manner of presenting and consuming the food, the organization of the meal and setting of the places . . . the seating plan, strictly but discreetly hierarchical, the censorship of all bodily manifestations of the act or pleasure of eating (such as noise or haste), the very refinement of the things consumed, with quality more important than quantity—this whole commitment to stylization tends to shift the emphasis from substance and function to form and manner, and so to deny the crudely material reality of the act of eating and of the things consumed, or, which amounts to the same thing, the basely material vulgarity of those who indulge in the immediate satisfactions of food and drink.⁸

While Saint Joseph's Table is itself a ritualized social ceremony, with its own ethical and aesthetic tone, the ritual as a whole emphasizes substance and function more than form. The noise, the crowd itself, and the non-hierarchical seating for the public, the plain and undisguised form of the food—these are all reminders that this popular religious practice

⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*. See especially chap. 3, 169-225.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

is rooted in poverty and starvation. The importance of eating—“the basely material vulgarity” of it—is held up here. It is not only on display, it is rendered holy.

Several additional practices at the celebration reinforce this impression. As the ritual unfolds, each guest views the main table and then pays a visit to the five surviving founders, who are sitting off to the side of the table. Along with warm embraces, guests receive a small brown paper bag containing the essential symbols of the devotion: a holy card, featuring a picture of the saint, a lemon, and a small loaf of bread. This practice, which recalls the Sicilian tradition of packing up leftovers for the poor to take with them, rekindles the memory of famine. It reminds the people of how basic eating really is, and how close at hand poverty once was, and for some still is.

The meal that is served to the public on Saint Joseph’s day also reflects the peoples’ consciousness of class distinctions. It is called a “poor man’s meal.” It consists of bread, *pasta e fagiole* (pasta with beans in soup), salad, and *calamari* (fried squid). While these foods are somewhat refined and stylized (and probably currently available in certain bourgeois restaurants), they are modest in that they emphasize basic nutrition. In the context of a now mostly middle-class setting, this is clearly meant to be a simple meal, emphasizing substance, intent on reminding people of their basic humanity, their humble roots, and their need for food. Many of the older Italian and Sicilian immigrants in the room will probably also remember times when their daily fare was much more sparse, and some of these very foods were their staples. In smelling, tasting, and sharing these foods, the memory of that experience of poverty is rekindled.

Generally speaking, the people in this room no longer live in fear of hunger or starvation. Many of the immigrant families have done well financially. Many members of Saint Joseph's society now live in beautiful middle-class homes, some of which are located on the upscale Palos Verdes Peninsula. Though these devotees of Saint Joseph are no longer poor, they almost all have working class roots. Additionally, there are some class differences notable among the devotional societies at Mary Star, even among the Italian ones. Among these groups, Saint Joseph's Table Society is self-consciously proud to be the most modest.

The society's approach to putting on church dinners demonstrates this modesty. For example, the dinner tables at this feast are attractively decorated, but on a simple scale. A few fresh flowers grace each table, and paper plates, tablecloths, and disposable utensils are in use. Donations to the society are accepted and encouraged from those who eat the dinner, but no particular amount is expected or required. It is stressed that no one will be turned away. The society raises approximately two thousand dollars through the Saint Joseph's Table festivities each year. With this, they fund four local high school scholarships (two for students attending Mary Star High School, and two for San Pedro High). Those in the society who organize the dinner pride themselves on their practice of promptly turning over the remaining receipts to the church.

Again, one senses a kind of pride in the humility of this. They are proud that they don't waste money on fancy table decorations, as they perceive that other societies do. They are proud that they don't hoard their money in separate bank accounts, as they claim

other societies do. They are proud that their money is used to help the church and the needy. I think the fact that they fund high school rather than college scholarships can also be read as an indicator of class. In particular, the fact that they help public school students who don't have to pay tuition, as well as Catholic school students who do, suggests an awareness of the needs of the poorest families in San Pedro.

When the pastor asked this society, recently, to raise money for the purchase of a new chalice for the parish, the members gladly complied. The cost of the chalice was high, approximately ten thousand dollars—the cost of commissioning a work of sacred art. The symbol that was chosen to be sculpted onto the chalice was a staff of wheat. The symbol of wheat is of course a key ingredient in bread, a central element in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. But wheat is also of particular importance to this group, which harbors the memory of famine and the importance of basic foods such as bread for survival.

One of the organizers of the fund-raising for the chalice said that she felt it was an honor that the Monsignor has asked their society to raise this money. She suggested that the Monsignor knew that Saint Joseph's Table Society would work hard to raise the money—and not just ask one wealthy parishioner to write a check. This presumably would make the chalice more meaningful, more holy.

This reverence for poverty, struggle, and thrift is perhaps an example of what Bourdieu has called turning a necessity into a virtue.⁹ It may also be a means of

⁹ Ibid., 189.

remembering and redressing their own experiences of hunger, and trying to insure that they will never be hungry again. Additionally, there is some cultural capital in maintaining modest and poverty-conscious ways in this setting. The favor and approval of the busy pastor, Monsignor Gallagher, is one example of this. When the Monsignor commends Anna for her piety, her closeness to Saint Joseph, she is very pleased indeed.

The food on Saint Joseph's table will not be eaten on the day of the Feast; on this day it is here for the Saint. Saint Joseph is thought to enjoy all of this fanfare, and even to go out of his way to insure good weather for the procession.¹⁰ The next day, the food will be distributed to the poor—through "Christian Care," an ongoing ministry of the church that feeds lunch to fifty to sixty persons per day. This practice, too, is in keeping with the roots of the devotion in Sicily, where the tables often directly fed the poor as a form of communal or public charity.¹¹ Saint Joseph's Table underscores the peoples' sense of their religious duty to feed the poor, a duty that is widely evidenced among the devout in San Pedro. It is to these feeding ministries that I shall now turn.

Feeding the Hungry

During an interview in her home, Anna, the organizer of the Table, mentions in passing that she has worked for Christian Care for four years. For at least one of those years, she was the sole person making sandwiches for the lunch program; it took several

¹⁰ I am told that once, a few years ago, rain was predicted on the feast day, and it did in fact rain during the Mass. The woman organizing prayed to St. Joseph to improve the weather, and the sun burst forth from the clouds just in time for the procession. "He wants his procession," she said. Interview # 7.

¹¹ Luisa Del Guidice, "St. Joseph's Tables."

hours each day. “The Monsignor ask me, so I do it,” she says simply. “We do a lot of stuff for him, he do [*sic*] a lot of stuff for us.”¹²

Anna’s work to feed the hungry was not unusual among the persons I interviewed. Though I did not specifically ask, at least seven of my thirty-one interviewees mentioned that they were involved in feeding ministries, as a critical expression of their faith. Had I inquired routinely, I suspect the number would have been higher. I was moved not only by the considerable commitments of time and resources that people routinely devote to these ministries, but also by the thoughtful theological reflection and spiritual devotion that these ministries represent and express for the devout.

One man, whom I shall call Rocco, has been working for Christian Care for eleven years, since his retirement from a successful seafood business in San Pedro. He is a member of the second generation, and feels that he has been blessed throughout his life. It seems to follow quite naturally, to him, that he should do what he can to help those who have not been so fortunate. His wife Susan helps at Christian Care too, but she points to Rocco, and says, “He does the most.”

Rocco’s daily routine involves leaving the house between 6:30 and 7:00 a.m. and driving around town in his pick-up truck, gathering leftover or slightly dated foodstuffs from restaurants and grocery stores. He then brings the food down to the church and unloads it. He stays to help out in whatever way he can, and finishes volunteering around

¹² Interview #7. Anna offers an example of the pastor’s reciprocity, noting that he has sometimes allowed her to put flowers at the church altar to Saint Joseph on his feast day, even though the feast usually falls during Lent, when flowers are not permitted in the sanctuary.

noon each day. He clearly loves the work and can't understand why it is so hard to get more committed volunteers. He says, "They help out for a few months, and then stop, because they don't get anything out of it." He admits that it can be difficult work, dealing with, "druggies, winos, and people who never tell the truth." But he feels it is his calling. "I believe with all my heart that the Lord wants me to do His work, not Mass fifteen times a day."¹³ Then he and his wife also show me the busy traveling schedule that they enjoy in their retirement. "These people (the guests at Christian Care) don't get any of this," they point out. Here, Rocco is telling us something about his theology and values that represents a shift that sometimes appears in the second generation. His comment about "Mass fifteen times a day" indicates his sarcasm or at least impatience with the devotional habits of some immigrants that do involve spending hours and hours in church. Rocco would rather express his faith through actions and invest his time in helping people, and his independent spirit comes through in the way he speaks so plainly about his calling.

Before he retired, Rocco was the well-known owner and operator of a successful door-to-door seafood business. He sold fish all over San Pedro and in several inland communities as well. He started out with nothing but an old truck and bed full of ice, and built a wildly successful business. He could have expanded it, had he been willing to hire others. But he chose to work independently, with no one to answer to but his customers. He feels very fortunate indeed to have made such a good living doing something he truly

¹³ Interview #23.

enjoyed. Rocco and Susan are also proud that they were able to put their three academically motivated children through college. "I've had a wonderful life," says Rocco. "Great kids. A great marriage." At this his wife looks at me meaningfully and insists, "Nothing is perfect, dear, nothing is perfect." The couple laughs easily. For them it seems clear that their good fortune is the gift of God. They know that life is tenuous. Perhaps they don't want to tempt fate—or the divine—by hoarding their good fortune. They claim that they are meant to do God's work, and this involves feeding the hungry.

The couple tells me of many miraculous stories from their day-to-day lives. They speak with emotion and conviction. Rocco notes that when he was a boy of fourteen, he was supposed to go fishing one day with his father and several other men. The night before, he couldn't sleep. He kept seeing a dark shadow in his bedroom and it scared him. The next morning, he was too tired to go fishing, so he stayed home. That day, the boat blew up. Two men died, two had third degree burns. Rocco's father was wounded and had to go to the hospital. "That shadow saved my life," Rocco claims. As a result of this, he suggests, he has a responsibility to try to save others. Whether pangs of survival guilt are operative here or not, Rocco demonstrates the way in which this accident has stayed with him, intensifying his appreciation of life and informing his religious practice.

But it is not just a sense of indebtedness that fuels the couple's charitable work. It is also their spiritual sense that God is operating through them. Rocco admits that he was not really very religious as a young man, but feels that he has become more spiritual in recent years. Susan encourages him to tell another story. "Tell her about when you were

thrown out of your chair!” she exclaims. He tells it less dramatically than she does, but the basic gist of the story is the same. Late one night, after the couple had gotten ready for bed, Rocco had settled into his favorite chair. He then had a strong bodily sensation, a feeling that he needed to get up. “Something was telling me to go to 19th and Pacific. I told my wife, ‘I’ve got to go pick up bread and food and give it to the homeless.’” “I thought he was crazy. I said ‘I’m all ready for bed. I’m not going with you,’” said Susan. Rocco quickly dressed and got his truck, picked up the food and found that there were indeed homeless people waiting for his delivery at 19th and Pacific. This is what he means when he says he feels “more spiritual” now. He feels he is in tune with God in his work to feed the hungry.

Pastoral ministries that feed the hungry are part and parcel of the faith at both Mary Star of the Sea and at Holy Trinity, the second largest Catholic church in San Pedro. These ministries require considerable volunteer labor from church members. This form of practical pastoral care appears to be linked to the devotions, to the memory of poverty and the struggle to survive that the devotions reinforce, and to the embodied form of spiritual practice that they encourage. The teaching and preaching of the Catholic churches here also articulate a link between faith and concrete service to the needy. Monsignor Gallagher, the pastor of Mary Star for fourteen years, has particularly stressed the need for the practical care-giving ministries of the laity. When I asked him about the emphasis on ministries to the poor during his tenure, he quoted the gospel of Matthew with ease. “We’ve become more conscious of the needy person, the homeless person, the

hungry, the imprisoned. After all, Our Lord tells us that what you do unto to least of these, you do unto me.”¹⁴

Another man I interviewed, Matthew, whose complex home altar I described in Chapter 2, also contends that faith must lead to action. This action revolves around food, as did our interview. Over bowls of *tortellini* in a highly spiced tomato sauce, Matthew told me of his intense and searching faith, a faith that finds practical expression in a ministry of food distribution at Holy Trinity parish. He told me about this work with some apology, as if to guard himself against bragging. “The only reason I say this is really for the sake of your interview, because I don’t like to pat myself on the back. But I’m in charge of a really large service organization at Trinity that I started, founded, and run.” I encouraged him to tell me more about it. He explained,

I just decided to call it the Outreach Program. And we minister food every week to families in the area that are poor, and you know, having a hard time fending for themselves right now. We deliver. We have a team of people that come in and pack, and another team of people that come in and drive the food, we have people that pick up the food at the food bank, and we’ve got probably about 150-200 people in the parish involved in it. So that’s my, that’s my membership in my church, because to me that’s much more important than sitting there and talking about it, that’s getting out and doing it. That’s a large part of the way that I live and the way that I pray. Because prayer is found in your devotion and in your active devotion in your work. I think it’s James that says that faith in itself without works is dead.¹⁵

Note that Matthew explicitly refers to his practical efforts as his devotion. While his youth, his education, and his combined study and practice of Buddhism as well as

¹⁴ Informational interview, 31 May 2000.

¹⁵ Interview #30.

Catholicism¹⁶ distinguish his experience from 78-year-old Rocco's, the two men's lives concur in their religious commitments to feeding the hungry. Each man believes that he possesses the talents and resources needed for this kind of ministry. Each seems to be possessed of an intense spiritual conviction that he is meant to do this work. Or, as Matthew says, with youthful candor: "If I've been given the gift to be able to do a charitable thing and I don't do it, then I spit in the face of the giver." The "lived religion" of these men includes an obligation, a religious bond, to feed the hungry.

A third story illustrates another form of pastoral feeding ministry at yet another Catholic church in San Pedro. It involves a very dignified second-generation immigrant, age eighty-five, the only person who volunteered to be interviewed. "Linda" saw my notice in the Mary Star bulletin, but she attends Mass at Little Sisters of the Poor, a parish related to a home for the elderly in the northern section of town. Linda has led a long and interesting life. She was a public health nurse, a veteran of World War II. She is also credited with starting the "Life Line" program in San Pedro, which placed electronic units in the homes of elderly persons, allowing them to call for help with the push of a button.

When asked what devotions mean to her, Linda says that for fourteen years, she visited the lonely and fed the handicapped at the nursing home each Sunday. Because of a health crisis of her own a year ago, she had to stop practicing this ministry for a while. She says, "I want to go back and feed in the feeding room. Somebody has to feed them." She explains that these are the patients who are handicapped in ways that prohibit them

¹⁶ See Chapter 2.

from feeding themselves. While the nursing home staff feeds these patients on weekdays, the home is short-handed on weekends. Linda adds, "I want to do something worthwhile. Not just be in the Women's Guild. I want to do something more than just get dressed up and go to a rich man's banquet."¹⁷

Linda grew up in poverty, but indicates that she is fairly well off now. She is somewhat critical of Mary Star of the Sea parish, which she finds ostentatious. "Mary Star is a much richer parish. Here we have close to two hundred people. Some really from poor families, or have *no* family. Some people have no visitor that ever comes." Linda supports the church financially, but emphasizes the importance of her pastoral ministry of feeding. "I give a donation every year—*ten percent*. My Sunday *duty* is to feed in the feeding room."¹⁸

Like Rocco, Linda believes that she has been blessed throughout her life. "I marvel every day at how much the Lord has given to me. Much more than I deserve. I own this home and my life is good. Every illness I've ever had the Lord has helped me through. I've said my prayers. 'Thank you for the things you've done for me, dear God.'"¹⁹

Like Rocco, Linda also experienced a brush with death as a teenager. At nineteen, she had pneumonia. In 1934, without penicillin, it was not unusual to die from this disease. Her mother cared for her diligently, praying the rosary continuously. Her mother

¹⁷ Interview #26.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

lifted Linda up and shifted her back and forth between two beds, so that she could change the sheets frequently, washing the linens by hand each day. The doctor stopped in to see Linda each morning and over time, the illness abated and Linda survived.

Linda tells this story vividly. She says it affected her whole life, and gave her a feeling of closeness and gratitude to her mother. Linda points to a picture of her mother at her bedside table, over which a rosary is draped (Figure 19). I cannot help but wonder whether the experience of this illness also influenced Linda's career choice of nursing and her lifelong charitable efforts to help the sick, including her current desire to help feed the handicapped persons in the nursing home. Did her own experience of helplessness and close brush with death "stay with her" in the way that fishing accidents, losses, and experiences of poverty have stayed with others in this community? Perhaps in caring for patients, and alleviating their helplessness and hunger, Linda is creatively redressing her own frightening experiences. These efforts may also help her feel connected to her deceased mother.

Rocco, Matthew, and Linda all engage in various feeding ministries. It may be that their ancestors' working class roots, and in particular, the memory of poverty have exerted some influence or inspiration toward these ministries. It may be that the traumatic brushes with death in their families' histories have intensified their attitudes toward life and faith, and helped motivate pastoral ministries geared toward survival. It seems clear that these individuals from the second and fourth immigrant generations experience an obligation to feed the hungry as a spiritual and moral duty.

Maria, whose story we explored in Chapter two, also participates in the ministry of feeding, referring to it matter-of-factly as if it is a basic spiritual duty. In the course of our interview, she drew a connection between her participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion and her work in feeding the poor. Maria is an immigrant who struggles to speak English. In explaining how her work at the church helped her “enter” this country, i.e., become actively involved in the life of Mary Star of the Sea Church, she said, “Now it’s okay. I am minister Eucharistica (a Eucharistic minister who serves communion). Every morning I give the cup at the 8:00 Mass . . . before I make sandwich[es] for the poor people.” Her words suggested a natural flow between giving the cup and making sandwiches, spiritual and material eating, drinking, and feeding.

The current pastor of Mary Star, Father Gallagher, drew the connection between communion and feeding ministries more explicitly. He said, in reference to Christian Care, “It’s at 5:00 a.m., out here on the sidewalk every morning that the real breaking of the bread takes place.” This sacramental view of feeding ministries finds an echo in attitudes toward family meals and the common cultural practice of hospitality.

Hospitality, Italian Style

One of the things that made my interviews so pleasant and so warm was the overwhelming hospitality of the people I interviewed. If there is one striking commonplace about the homes I visited, it was the presence of a large, serviceable dining room or kitchen table. It was at these tables that most of my interviews were conducted. On these tables, plates of delicious and fresh homemade Italian cookies constantly

appeared. Along with the cookies, tiny (*demitasse*) cups of *espresso*—dark Italian coffee—seemed always at the ready. If an interview ran into the lunch or dinner hour, I would often be invited to stay and eat. Bowls of homemade soup were also frequently ladled up. Often I would leave with a plate of beautiful fancy cookies to take home. After a while, I got the hang of it, and took a part in the ritual of hospitality myself. I would sometimes arrive at my interviews with a small gift of food, such as loaf of bread, or a coffee cake from Ramona's bakery down on Gaffey Street. The pleasure of these small exchanges was immense.

In one case, when I requested an evening time for an interview, I was invited to dinner. I immediately said, "I don't want to put you to any trouble." My informant replied wryly, "We eat every night." When I agreed to come, my hostess, whom I shall call "Rosa," invited another Italian couple to join us, so that I could interview them as well.

Around a huge dining room table, we ate and drank together. It was a leisurely meal of several courses, offered with homemade wine. Rosa's husband, Martyn, an immigrant from Croatia, did the cooking. After appetizers and pasta, he served the entree of grilled white sea bass. Martyn is a retired fisherman, and a fabulous cook. He had prepared his own marinade and grilled the bass to perfection. He served it with green beans, a tomato salad, and fresh warm bread. Throughout the evening, the courses kept appearing, the wine flowing, and my tape recorder (with permission) was rolling.

Around this table, some wonderful moments were shared. These were four dear friends, gathered to tell me their stories. They were all immigrants who had come over as children. They were from different places: Rome, Sicily, and Croatia. But they were of similar ages (fifty-five through sixty-one), they had experienced similarly frightening adventures in immigrating, and they shared similar faith and devotional practices. They took turns answering my questions with candor, often launching into stories that illustrated a point. Some of the deeper stories, the more painful ones, emerged with tears. These poignant moments were quickly followed by funny and joyful comments.

I kept getting the feeling that something significant was happening there at the table. I was glad to be a part of it. The food was plentiful and delicious, and it was matched by a depth and quality of conversation that surprised me. While my questions certainly had a role in prompting such reflections, I had the sense that these were stories that needed to be told, and stories that could only be told around a table. There was a vibrancy, an intimacy, that seemed connected to the food itself, as well as to the considerable pleasure of consuming it together with this group of friends. It was after 10:00 p.m. before I tried to pull myself away from the table and the conversation. But when I turned off the tape recorder, the conversation got better, so I stayed a while longer.

We can look at what was happening here at many levels. Bourdieu might see it as an example of the distinct “food space” of the working class. He writes,

The art of eating and drinking remains one of the few areas in which the working class explicitly challenge the legitimate art of living. In the face of the new ethic of sobriety for the sake of slimness, which is most recognized at the highest levels of the social hierarchy, peasants and

especially industrial workers maintain an ethic of convivial indulgence. A bon vivant is not just someone who enjoys eating and drinking; he is someone capable of entering into the generous and familiar—that is, both simple and free—relationship that is encouraged and symbolized by eating and drinking together, in a conviviality which sweeps away restraints and reticence.²⁰

Certainly these friends and I were entering into the “generous and familiar,” simple and free relationship that eating and drinking together encourages. (I hasten to point out that very little wine, less than a carafe, was consumed). I think that it was the conviviality that we experienced together that swept away “restraints and reticence,” and allowed the speakers to tell their stories so honestly. One man described the pain and shock and tears that immigration entailed for him as a boy of fourteen. He offered a detailed and gripping description of cramped housing, offensive odors (from the canneries and oil refineries), and the fear of going to school when he spoke not a word of English. This man is now a successful electrical contractor, an upbeat and affable fellow, whose immigration story is probably not widely known or frequently told. But in the context of a dinner with friends, he offered it with tender emotion.

Some weeks later, I interviewed “Antonia,” one of the daughters of Rosa and Martyn, the couple who had hosted the dinner. She is thirty-four, and a teacher at Mary Star’s elementary school. She strikes me as joyful, like her parents. She speaks with pride of her husband, an immigrant whom she met in Sicily, who learned to speak English and in other ways made his own immigrant transition to this country very well. Antonia tells me that they have a four-year old son. In speaking of her son, she fights back tears.

²⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 179.

They have just learned that he has been diagnosed with a serious developmental condition. "Believe me, if I didn't have faith, I'd be in trouble. He's doing well, and I have to thank God for that."²¹ She went on to tell me that she has made a practice of putting holy water on her son's body.

Of the saints, she says, "They hold us up. Through all these statues and novenas. They give us a little boost. They remind you you're on the right path. You think back: you've had such a great family tie. It keeps me strong."²² Clearly, Antonia is relying on the devotions emotionally and spiritually, as she adjusts to this news about her son. She is also relying on her strong bonds of connection with her family for practical help in raising him. Her father, Martyn, takes care of the boy most days when Antonia is teaching.

When asked if there was anything else she wanted to say about the meaning of faith or spirituality in her life, she said, "Love begins and ends it all. That eating together really does it . . . eating, communicating, kissing, loving!"²³ Her eyes welled up with tears. Having eaten at her parents' table, I could appreciate Antonia's meaning. I could see how generous and genuine her family really was. I could see, too, how love, faith, and food were, in this family, habitually and apparently effortlessly intermingled.

While this dynamic was perhaps more pronounced and compelling in this family, it was not unlike the dynamics I witnessed in other homes, at other tables. The habit of

²¹ Interview #13.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

sitting down and eating together, while conversing and relaxing, was extremely common. These shared meals and coffee breaks frequently expand to include guests and extended family members. The depth of communication and caring that characterizes these occasions certainly varies. But an emphasis on the importance of sharing food together is taken for granted. Sharing food is a basic form of care. Food is a means through which the devout and their descendants sustain themselves, each other, and those who are hungry—persons whom they may not know but for whose plight they have some appreciation. This practice is itself religious, in that it expresses an ethical obligation to sustain life and to maintain social networks of support and connection.

Food, Ethnic Identity, and Gender

A discussion of the religious importance of food in this setting inevitably leads to questions about gender roles. Who is preparing all of this food that is so generously offered? Who is baking the cookies and making the coffee? Martyn, a retired fisherman, prepared the delicious meal for the dinner party. In this particular household, this is quite common; his wife Rosa still works full time, and Martyn likes to cook. In fact, one of the “saving graces” of the fishing occupation, from the point of view of some women, is that the men who spent so much time away at sea were forced to learn to cook, and many of them became quite good at it—at least at preparing fish. Men in this setting also prepare pizza and sometimes do “heavy” cooking tasks such as frying squid or grilling other entrees for large-scale devotional events or fund-raising dinners. Still, by and large, I

have the impression that it is the women who do much of the daily food preparation, and probably all of the baking.

The preparation of food is also inevitably mixed up with constructions of ethnicity in this setting. We can get a glimpse of these intertwining issues by looking at the stories of three women, ages forty-four to fifty-one, who are all good friends, and who are all connected to this community of devout whether through family, marriage, and/or their own devotional practices. Lisa, a member of the “two-thirds” generation (second generation by one parent, third by the other), exemplifies unusual zeal about matters of food preparation in relation to her constructions of motherhood. Lisa, forty-four, says of herself:

I am an *intense* mother. . . . I make my children’s breakfast, I make their lunches, and I make their dinner. I make dinner five nights a week. I feel they need the nutrition. I cook fresh fish, fresh vegetables, so they get vitamins. We have dinner together every night. And it’s hard because of my husband’s business. He rarely gets home before seven or seven-thirty. My kids say, ‘Mom, I’m hungry.’ I say, ‘Have a snack.’ It’s important that we wait for him.²⁴

Some of Lisa’s intensity about waiting for her husband to come home for supper is probably related to the painful experiences that both she and her husband endured as children, when their fathers who were fishermen were often away at sea.²⁵ But Lisa’s intensity around food preparation itself is also quite striking. Lisa is a working mother.

²⁴ Interview #25.

²⁵ See Chapter 3.

She teaches language arts and science in a grammar school in a neighboring town. Given her job, it cannot be easy for her to prepare all of her children's meals.

When I questioned her about this, she said, "I feel I have an obligation to be the best mother I can be." (Hearing this, I felt like the worst mother I could be, but I encouraged Lisa to say more). Lisa linked her rigorous habits of meal preparation to her Italian ethnic identity and the importance of family. "We have pasta on Sundays. That's when the whole (extended) family gets together," she adds. Lisa's food preparation, her religious practice, and her construction of her ethnicity are all quite deliberate. "You have to work at being a Catholic," she says, "It's not easy." Lisa works at being Italian, too. She did not grow up in a family that was nearly as "traditional" as the one she is dedicated to creating. For example, Lisa learned to speak Italian—which she does fluently—at age 21, when she got married, so that she could communicate with her in-laws. She also told me that she chose to marry a man of Italian descent. "I consciously did it to carry on the Italian heritage," she claims.²⁶ She and her husband also choose to do business with Italians when possible. Their children's orthodontist is Italian, as are their favorite grocers. Lisa goes on at great length about the delicacies that she purchases at the Italian market. I gain the impression that close family ties, strong ethnic identity, and committed Catholic faith are of a piece for Lisa. Food is the substance that holds them all together.

²⁶ Interview #25.

The work of Micaela di Leonardo, an anthropologist who studied Italians in northern California, is helpful as we think about Lisa's story. Di Leonardo's 1984 study adroitly deconstructs the myth of the Italian family, laying clear the ways that gender is inscribed in popular constructions of Italian ethnicity.²⁷ In particular, she shows how the work involved in maintaining ethnic kinship networks—such as cooking traditional foods for extended family gatherings and caring for elderly relatives—almost always falls disproportionately to women. Di Leonardo points out that the labor of maintaining ethnic identity is really an extension of the regular work of kinship—including organizing holiday gatherings, sending cards, giving presents, and preparing meals—that usually falls disproportionately to women, whether they identify as ethnic or not.²⁸ But ethnic constructions of womanhood tend to add to women's kinship labor, especially in the area of cooking. In her study, di Leonardo found a great variety in women's patterns of taking on, rejecting, or compromising with the mass media image of the ideal Italian woman cooking for and serving her family. She writes:

The Italian-American women in this study have embraced, modified, and rejected this dominant image of ethnic life. These women, like all American women, live in a society that is simultaneously class-stratified and patriarchal. They deal variously with class and gender divisions. Ethnicity is a further filter on this process; but for women in particular, just (as) for the population as a whole, there are varieties of ethnic experience.²⁹

²⁷ di Leonardo, *Varieties of Ethnic Experience*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 229. For two other treatments of the role of choice in ethnic identity, see Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

Lisa is a woman who has embraced the dominant popular image of the good Italian wife and mother. She did not inherit this as a cultural characteristic, nor did she model herself after her own mother, a successful real estate agent who did not go to church. Lisa has chosen this ethnic and religious identity and her zealous habits of food preparation for her own reasons. We could speculate that these reasons may have to do with Lisa's nostalgic affection for her Italian grandparents, who did take her to church, or that Lisa is compensating for a lack of close religious and interpersonal involvement with her parents. But it is important to see that Lisa's ethnic identity, which she maintains so scrupulously through preparing meals and hosting large-scale gatherings at her home, imposes burdens on her even as she finds joy and fulfillment in it. For example, Lisa has raised her children with almost no reliance on baby-sitters, in deference to what she perceives to be the Italian way. She also regularly visits her Godmother in a nursing home, and has already promised her in-laws that they will never have to go to a nursing home, because Lisa and her husband are planning to take them into their home when the time comes. The weight of the burdens that Lisa has taken on is reduced somewhat by her family's affluence and material comforts. Nevertheless, Lisa's ideal requires that she do much of the kinship labor herself. Another example is that she prefers to throw large parties at home, rather than in restaurants, because it gives more of a family feeling. The burdens of domestic and kinship labor that Lisa very enthusiastically embraces are considerable.

The other women in Lisa's circle experience burdens, too, though they do not embrace the same model that Lisa does. Lisa's two good friends who are also teachers,

Josephine and Joanna, employ two alternative approaches. Josephine, whom we met in chapter two, was brought to this country as a baby. In her immigrant family of origin, she is the best English speaker and the only one who went to college. She therefore assumes the role that usually falls to second-generation children—that of interpreting for parents, and handling all of the family's financial and legal matters. Josephine is married to a man she met in Sicily, who then immigrated to this country. Early on in their marriage, for a period of seven years, her husband's brother moved in with them, causing Josephine's domestic duties to expand. Josephine and her husband have two teenage children now, and live comfortably in a lovely home in Palos Verdes. Josephine is extremely active in the devotions at Mary Star, where she serves as the vice-president of the Trapetto Club, a "small" society of one hundred or so members devoted to the Madonna del Ponte—Our Lady of the Bridge. Josephine teaches high school Spanish. She is also dedicated to teaching youth as much as possible about Italian culture, and even took a high school group on a tour of Italy a few years ago.

When I went to her home to interview Josephine on a Saturday afternoon, I noticed several large plates of brownies and cakes on her immaculate kitchen counter. She had baked these for an outing of the Trapetto Club, scheduled for the following day. Large bouquets of flowers were also lined up in her living room for the event. I was impressed by the amount of work that Josephine's participation in the devotions entails. Her preparation of food for these events, along with her actual participation in them, consume numerous hours. Josephine has thought a great deal about Italian culture,

change, and women's roles. Though she is proud of her education and her profession, and claims she can draw from both Italian and American cultures, she also indicates an awareness of the additional strain that this cultural negotiation places on her. She sometimes wonders about the wisdom of taking on double the work of the other women in her family. "They're just happy with their own little small circle of life," she says of these women. "They don't worry about the environment. The more you know, the more you worry."³⁰

Josephine is glad to have some of what she considers "American values." She says that she and her husband make decisions together. She appreciates this increased power in her marriage. But she worries about the breakdown of the American family, and admits that dinner time around her house is often "up in the air." Though she prays every night, her family's attendance at Mass is "up and down" because she is so busy. When someone in her family needs help, she says, "Because the guilt is so heavy, I drop everything and go."³¹ Josephine's constructions of her cultural identity as being American in one way and Italian in another give her some wiggle room—she says she can take the best from each culture. She is not as dogmatic about meal preparation or church attendance as her friend Lisa is. But Josephine's prominent role in her extended family and her vigorous participation in the devotional societies add considerable burdens of time, energy, and labor to her life. On some level, she seems to be aware of this. As she

³⁰ Interview #16.

³¹ Ibid.

put it in an interview with a different researcher, "Trying to be a modern wife in traditional society is hard."³²

The third friend in this trio of teachers is Joanna, the daughter of Susan and Rocco, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Joanna is a third-generation woman whose parents are Italian and Sicilian. She is fiercely proud of what she calls her "heritage," in spite of the jokes that people inevitably make linking Sicilians to organized crime.³³ Joanna celebrates her Italian and Sicilian heritage through foodways, and by having a large elaborate extended family gathering in her home every Christmas Eve. She also credits her parents' Italian values for the emphasis she places on children and family. For example, Joanna is married to a non-Italian, "a real WASP," in her words. She feels his mother was always a little bit prejudiced against her for being Italian. This is clearly painful for Joanna to acknowledge. Nevertheless, now that her mother-in-law is elderly and needs frequent care, Joanna and her husband—more than any of his three siblings—have taken it upon themselves to stay nearby geographically and to provide as much care for her as they can. Again, Joanna calls this "Italian values."³⁴

Joanna is the woman I quoted in Chapter 1 who asked me whether I had "the guilt." She acknowledges that she feels guilty about one thing: not raising her sons in the

³² Interview with Erica Turley, 2 June 1999. Quoted in an unpublished paper by Turley, "The Development of Italian Women's Identity," 16 June 1999.

³³ Josephine's sixteen-year-old son was around during the interview, so we asked him what he would say if some one asked him about his ethnic identity. He replied by noting that on the SAT forms, they don't have a box for Italians or Sicilians, so he checks "white." On the school soccer field, where kids regularly form teams based on ethnic and racial identity, he also doesn't quite fit. "There's a Mexican team and an Italian team," he said. "But I told them I'm not Italian, I'm Sicilian. So they put me on the white team," he laughed. Interview #21.

³⁴ Interview #21.

church. This is because, unlike her friends, Joanna stopped going to church at Mary Star when she was seventeen. An excellent high-school student, trained in science, she had begun questioning many things about her faith. But what really pushed the scales over for Joanna was a sermon that a priest preached on Mother's Day. She explained,

I would really listen to the sermons and they'd make me angry. Every Sunday it'd make me angry. I was seventeen. It was Mother's Day. Father Logan got up there and started talkin' about the Virgin Mary. On and on about her being a virgin. On Mother's Day! I looked at my mother and said, 'Do you realize he's calling you a whore?' She said, 'Don't listen, honey. Just don't listen.' That was it. I never went to Mass again.³⁵

Joanna's comments reveal one of her mother's coping strategies that could be called resistance. Is this how she herself has been coping with sermons that offend, by just not listening? Does she feel the freedom to ignore church teachings with which she disagrees? And has she communicated this capacity to resist to her daughter, Joanna? Joanna said she couldn't stand "the hypocrisy, the insensitivity, the ignorance!" of the priest. She perceived his words as an affront to women. When she decided to leave the church, Joanna said her mother was "hurt, but not devastated." I wonder if her mother might have been at least a bit proud.

Joanna has rejected the institutional Catholic Church, but she told me that she still considers herself a Catholic, as much as she considers herself Italian. She says it's a way of thinking, a way of being that has stuck with her. Her guilt comes from knowing that

³⁵ Ibid.

she has something to fall back on, while her children do not. She says of this, “When I’m in need, I lean on prayer. When I’ve done everything I can logically do. I don’t practice organized religion, but I resort to prayer when I have a health problem. It’s hypocritical, but it’s part of my being.”³⁶ It is a part of her being that Joanna values, and finds comfort in. Her guilt comes from feeling that her sons won’t have access to that source of comfort in the same way that she does.

Joanna tells me that she did make some attempts to bring her sons up in the church. She said, “When your kids are born, you get all those mother hormones.” Those “hormones” apparently led Joanna to have her boys baptized. Or maybe she was hedging her bets on her scientific constructions of the universe: she also put crucifixes in her babies’ rooms, and pinned red ribbons with baby medals on their layette suits for the first three months of life—“to ward off jealousy or whatever it is.” Later, Joanna gave Mary Star another try, on behalf of her sons. She took them to C.C.D. (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) classes. In fact, she sat in with them for four years when they took these classes, to see what they were being taught. But she never returned to the church.

These three women demonstrate some of the variety of ethnic and religious experience within my sample. Joanna, more than the others, has consciously rejected the “insensitive” Catholic constructions of Mary as the ideal woman. But she does construct her identity as an Italian woman who values family above all else, an ethnic construction that requires considerable kinship labor to maintain. Joanna seems less caught in the

³⁶ Interview # 21.

complexities of negotiating her cultural ideals, and less burdened by extra work.

However, she does have that guilt.

While these three friends have arrived at different compromises in the degree to which they accept, revise, or reject the dominant construction of the good Italian Catholic woman, none of them seem to be hoodwinked into a groveling conformity. They all exhibit some resistance to official church teachings. And they all exercise some freedom in regard to their ethnic and religious practices. It is important to note that because these women all went to college and entered teaching professions, they actually do have a broader range of choices open to them than their mothers did. They are also all more financially comfortable than their mothers were. Nevertheless, all of these women work hard at being “good mothers” to their own children and actively involve themselves in helping members of their extended families as well. And of course, they cook. The commitment and enthusiasm with which these women live out their constructions of Italian family values are impressive. Less easy to measure are the costs, in terms of time, energy, and stress, that such deeply rooted and demanding ideals exact from these women.

San Pietro Dinner Dance

The importance of food, ethnic constructions of gender roles, and even some of the conflict that the community experiences in relation to devotional practices were all in evidence at a fundraising dinner held in the Mary Star auditorium. This event contrasts rather sharply with the Saint Joseph’s Table Feast that I described at the beginning of this

chapter. Held in the same space a mere month later, and involving many of the same people, this event demonstrates both change and resistance in attitudes toward food, wealth, and gender roles.

I had no idea of what I was getting into when I decided to go to this dinner. It was unlike any event I had ever experienced, especially in the category of church fund-raising suppers. I was surprised, first, by the turnout. I had thought that it might be slim, given the thirty-dollar per-person ticket price. I needn't have worried. I arrived to find a large crowd of extremely well dressed people milling outside near the door. The Italian band, again led by Tony De Bruno, was already in full swing when I arrived. A busy cash bar was in operation, selling mixed drinks. The bar was set up directly under a banner featuring the words "San Pietro Society" and a picture of the saint, holding the familiar keys to the kingdom. I wondered if anyone else present thought this arrangement to be the slightest bit odd.

My informant for the evening, Josephine, was already inside, scrambling along with perhaps four hundred others for a place at a table near family and friends. The room was lavishly decorated. Fabric tablecloths covered the twenty long tables on either side of the room, and a huge centerpiece rested on each one. The centerpieces were ceramic models of fishing boats, with a lone fisherman in each one. The pieces were all hand-painted by a local artist. Each one was slightly different. These objects were on sale, for one hundred and fifty dollars each.

The large, noisy crowd soon began to form a line near the *hors d'oeuvres* table. The table featured huge platters of *bruschette*, olives, marinated mushrooms, fresh tomatoes, sliced cheeses, salami, ham, and two forms of squid—a cold salad and fried *calamari*. Amidst the noise and confusion, I saw many people that I knew, and was greeted with fond recognition and warm embraces. Eventually, my informant and I found our way through the line and then to our places at a table. I asked Josephine how many people in the room spoke Italian. She guessed 99.9%. I listened to the music of the various dialects that I heard spoken throughout the evening, doing my best to keep up with the conversation. It occurred to me that those who claim that Italian ethnicity in America has become merely “symbolic,”³⁷ or is now “attenuated”³⁸ probably haven’t been to San Pedro. I suspect that the size and vitality of the Italian population in San Pedro is rather exceptional.³⁹

There is undoubtedly conflict in this large and lively group, and some of it came to the surface in the conversation around my table at the dinner-dance. It started with a critique of the centerpieces. I was told that simple centerpieces would have been better, so that more money could go to the church. “The San Pietro Society wants to show off,”

³⁷ See Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962).

³⁸ Robert Orsi has suggested that Italian ethnicity has become attenuated in America. While this is accurate in a general way, the case of San Pedro challenges this notion because of the phenomenon of continuing immigration. Robert Orsi, remarks given during a teleconference with Professor Hal Barron at Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, Calif., 20 Oct. 1999.

³⁹ While the stream of continuing immigration from Italy is not as strong as it was during the heyday of the fishing industry, this event seems to suggest evidence of a still robust Italian presence in the community. Luisa Del Guidice of the Italian Oral History Institute comments that continuing immigration constitutes something of a “brain drain” in Italy. Interestingly, she notes that there is also some return migration going on at present. Personal e-mail correspondence, 8 Feb. 2001.

was the refrain of some members of the more modest Saint Joseph Society. People then scanned the evening's program, and pointed out that nearly every item on the elaborate menu—from shrimp to steaks to *tiramisu*—had been donated. They estimated that the San Pietro Society would clear upwards of twelve thousand dollars on the dinner, not counting the money from the sale of drinks or raffle tickets. But when the pastor arrived to offer his blessing before the meal, he was presented with a check for five thousand dollars for the church's ongoing financial campaign to build a new high school. The pastor accepted the money graciously, but my tablemates sneered. "Why do they not give more? They keep the money for a long time," said one woman, who expressed the opinion that the San Pietro Society is entirely too fancy, and not dedicated enough to the church. This is a point of contention that I heard discussed many times. Several other individuals expressed hurt feelings over the leadership of this young society, its lavish style, and its independent banking habits.

I wondered if these were class issues, or if the tensions were possibly related to generational styles. It is interesting to note that humility is still invested with social capital for some. Others, I think, are proud of their wealth, and happy for a chance to display and celebrate it. The issue of regional differences also occurred to me. For example, could this stress be a remnant of older tensions between the Sicilian immigrants and those from Ischia? But there appear to be no firm lines of division between these groups. Many of the same people attend all kinds of functions. Many also prefer not to

take sides in this debate, but just to enjoy the festivities. In any case, the drama of the evening soon drowned out the conflict, at least at my table.

Suddenly, with a musical flourish to introduce them, about a dozen women servers, dressed in identical flowing royal blue evening gowns, streamed down the center of the auditorium. They were each holding two fish-shaped bottles of wine high in the air, one red and one white. People responded audibly to the excitement of their entrance. The women hastened to place the bottles on each table, as some applauded and others hummed their approval. The feast had begun, and these women were at the center of it, seeming to enjoy the fanfare and their central role. But I was surprised to see that these women continued to serve the entire dinner throughout the evening. Though they used serving carts to help them, I felt concerned because some of the women are older, and I knew that at least one of them had been ill. I could see how hard they were working, and wondered at the fact that no men were helping the women hand off the huge platters of steaming pasta. When the folks at the tables clamored for more food, the women ran, in their royal blue high heels, to refill the platters.

I winced at this display of female servitude. I knew that men had helped cook the dinner as they had otherwise helped plan and carry off the event. I knew there were men working in the kitchen. But women only performed this serving ritual. Their flowing dresses called attention to the female form. It seemed clear that this feature of the ritual was enacting and displaying painfully patriarchal divisions of labor. I asked the pastor about this later. Did he think that these rituals helped to reinforce prescribed gender

roles? He replied rather curtly that the men do more of the cooking than the women do at Mary Star. Of course, this answer does not address the role of women as servers of men. Also, I am not convinced that the pastor's assessment was entirely accurate (Was he counting the cookie-baking?). But I was pleased that he could even try to make the argument, because this suggests that the men at Mary Star do routinely take on at least some of the labor of food preparation. My general conclusion is that this ritualized public event was enacting and celebrating a traditional gender ideal, even though the strict division of labor in relation to food preparation has begun to shift in practice.

This evening expressed a joy in feasting and friendship that I find quite remarkable. The eating and drinking, dancing and conversation went on well into the night. The people engaged in feisty discussions and continued to comment on the food, the decor, and program throughout the evening. In spite of their disagreements, or maybe because of them, people were having a great time. Among friends and family, they were free to argue and critique each other's styles. But the general tenor of the evening was jovial and warm. The people were celebrating their faith, their language, their success, and their contested styles. They were also raising money for their church, and they were doing this all through the medium of food—food that was elaborately prepared, bountifully served, and heartily consumed. In their peculiarly Italian, immigrant, and Catholic way, they were breaking bread together.

In the epilogue to her ground-breaking book about the religious meaning of food in the later Middle Ages, Caroline Walker Bynum suggests, "Perhaps we should not turn

our backs so resolutely as we have recently done on . . . food and the female body as positive, complex, and resonant symbols of love and generosity.”⁴⁰ It seems to me that food functions as a resonant symbol of love and generosity in the devotional practices in San Pedro. While these practices do reflect traditional gender roles, devout women also exhibit resistance, variation, and innovation as they use food to construct their ethnic and religious identities. Food, the substance without which human beings cannot live, is invested with sacred meaning in this place. Through large-scale feasts such as Saint Joseph’s Table, or fund-raising dinner dances, the goodness of food and the human body are enshrined. Through ministries that feed the poor, and through daily habits that involve sharing food together, the devout nurture and are nurtured, feed and are fed, body and soul.

⁴⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 301.

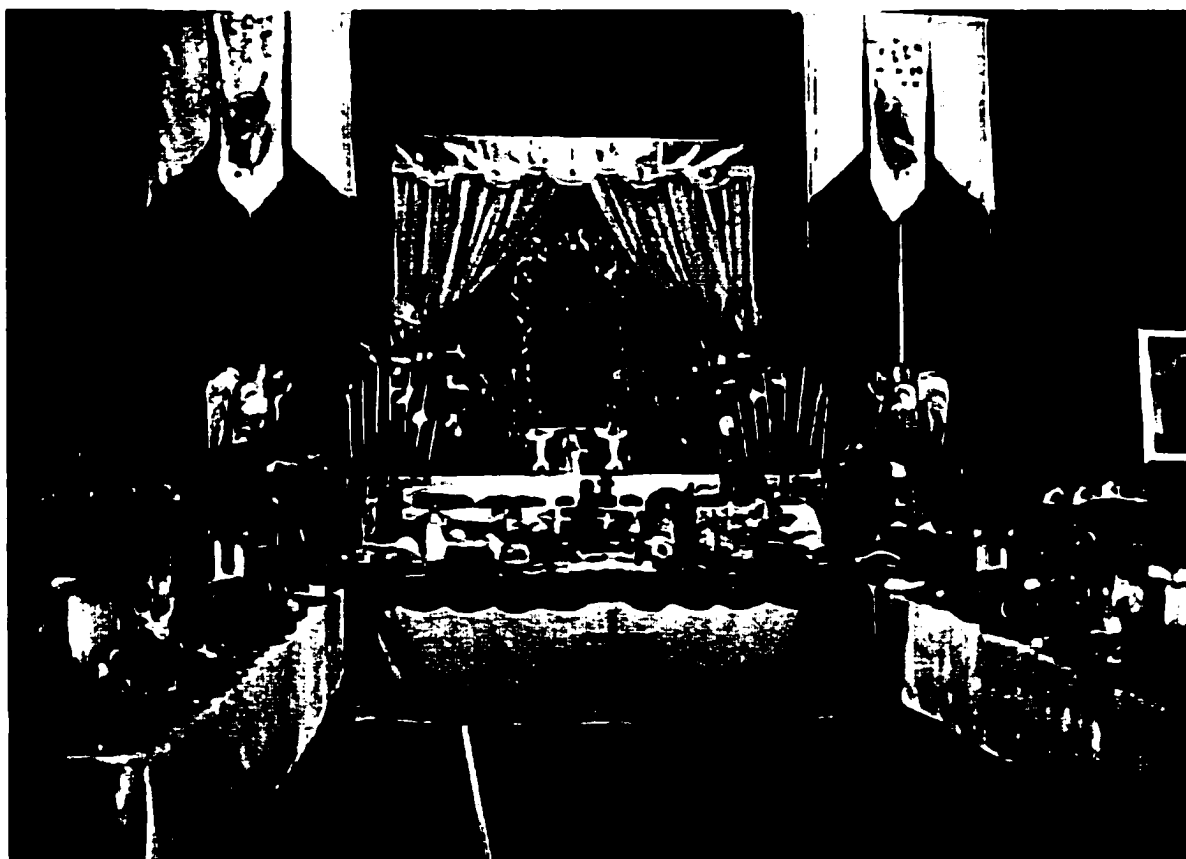


Figure 33 - St. Joseph's Table Feast, March 19, 2000. The table in the parish hall is covered with a variety of fresh food, especially produce, breads, and cakes. Flowers, candles, and smaller statues are interspersed with an array of foods.



Figure 34 - Close-up view of statue of Saint Joseph surrounded by flowers and lights on Feast Day, March 19, 2000. Saint Joseph is the patron saint of Sicily and of the poor.

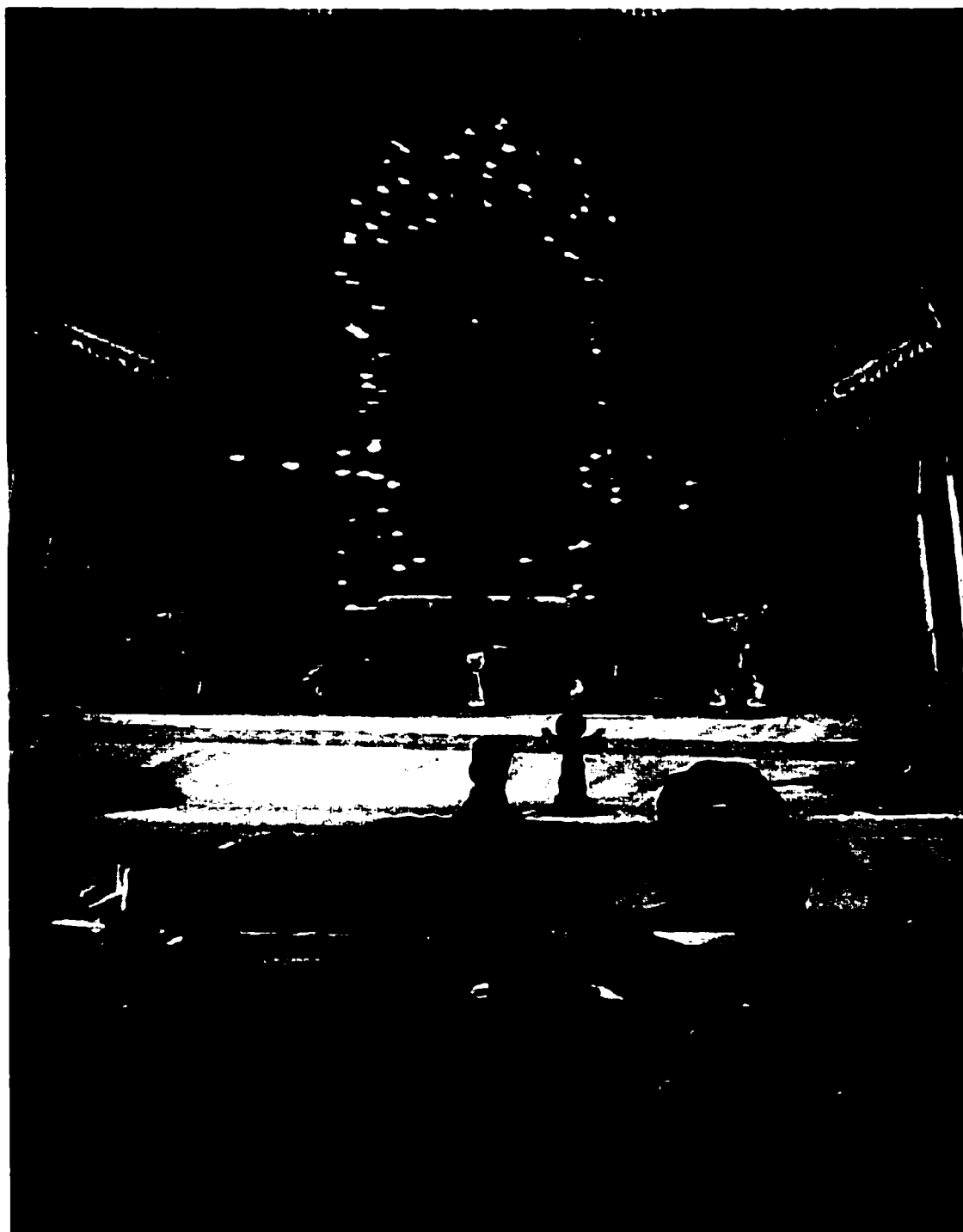


Figure 35 - Loaves of sesame bread in the shape of a halo, a palm frond, a cross, and a staff. This table is in the early stages of preparation for the feast.



Figure 36 - Chocolate carpenter's tools signify the occupation of Saint Joseph, the humble carpenter. See small cakes in the shape of a shell, a shamrock, and a cross, and larger cake made to resemble a lamb. Lemons are in the back at right.



Figure 37 – Assorted homemade Italian cookies. Cookies are brought in the previous day, arranged in assortments, and wrapped for sale on the day of the feast.



Figure 38 – The statue of St. Joseph is carried out of the church as the second procession begins.



Figure 39 - Italian American band set up on stage inside the auditorium for Saint Joseph's Table Feast celebration.



Figure 40 - St. Joseph with money pinned to his sash. There are some personal checks attached as well.

CHAPTER 5

Holding On, Letting Go, and Being Held: A Pastoral Theological Analysis

All critical capacities are cultural by virtue of being linguistic and historically situated; but they can still be creative, subversive, inspirational and prophetic.

Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice*

Nor is it necessary to be theologically self-conscious to be religiously sophisticated.

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*

Thus far, we have examined Italian Catholic devotional practices in San Pedro through a consideration of practices of visual piety (Chapter 2), through an examination of the immigrants' historical ties to the fishing industry (Chapter 3), and through an exploration of the function and meaning of food in this setting (Chapter 4). In these chapters, we have seen how the Catholic devotional practices both embody certain conventional theological understandings and reveal innovative impulses. Some of the innovations are related to the experience of immigration itself and the practical adaptations and emotional strains involved in relocating in a new and different environment. Other innovations seem to be related to generational shifts and the evolving needs of the children and grandchildren of the immigrants who understand faith and their devotional practices in diverse ways. Yet in almost all cases, the devotions studied here exhibit some of the "subversive, creative, inspirational and prophetic"¹ dimensions that Elaine Graham speaks of. By focusing on these practices themselves as the locus of

¹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 109.

theological meaning and care, we can come closer to apprehending their theological import and their transformative potential. By reflecting on individuals' theological constructions as well as observing their practices, we can advocate for the theological authority of the people themselves, their religious sophistication,² and their interpretive powers.

The title of pastoral theologian Elaine Graham's book, *Transforming Practice*,³ has at least two meanings. One of them has to do with the power of practice to transform and shape human beings. The other alludes to the power of human beings to creatively transform their practices. According to Graham, human identity and theology are continuously forged through practice. Thus, if we want to encourage human transformation, resistance, or creativity, then we must look to actual particular religious practices, and try to excavate and articulate the "practical knowledge" that is already embodied in them. Here Graham relies on the Aristotelian concept of practical knowledge or *phronêsis*, which "locates truth in enacted or performative knowledge."⁴ Graham argues for a model of practical wisdom that "is both 'indwelt' and 'constructed': *habitus* as handed down and re-interpreted anew for every generation."⁵ The practical wisdom of which Graham speaks both can be discerned in and found to evolve out of the practice of religious faith. The task of pastoral theology, then, is to excavate, articulate,

² Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 106.

³ Graham, *Transforming Practice*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

and interpret the accumulated and evolving wisdom of a faith community as it is expressed through practice.

Graham's approach is consistent with my theological position, which is close to what Sheila Davaney calls "pragmatic historicism." One feature of this position is the recognition of the historical character of human existence, of our embeddedness in complex and multiple traditions of meaning. There is no one authoritative Christian tradition, no grand narrative to which we can appeal. The practices and worldviews of diverse persons and communities, including members of marginalized groups, merit theological attention. Davaney calls for a move toward "the democratization of tradition and culture."⁶ She writes:

In this view it is no longer adequate to focus only on the formalized doctrines of a tradition, its prevailing symbols, its recognized classics or even its dominant rituals and practices. Instead our theological reach must extend to consideration of and engagement with the worldviews, beliefs, symbols and practices of ordinary persons who, far from being the passive recipients of the construction of value and meaning by those more powerful, are significant contributors to and conveyers of the traditions within which they reside.⁷

In keeping with these theological principles, this study is focused on ordinary people, their devotional practices, and their theological constructions.

Theology entails not only a worldview, but also an ethos. I stated in the introduction that I have great respect (in Italian, *rispetto*) and affection for the people who have shared their stories with me. This may result in a tendency to advocate for the logic

⁶ Sheila Greeve Davaney. "Mapping Theologies: An Historicist Guide to Contemporary Theology." in *Changing Conversations: Religious Reflection and Cultural Analysis*. eds. Dwight N. Hopkins and Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York: Routledge, 1996). 39.

of these practices or for greater appreciation of their salutary dimensions. I am not alone in taking an advocacy stance. In the closing essay to the collection entitled *Changing Conversations*, Davaney notes that most of the authors included in the collection write from a perspective of "identification with and advocacy on behalf of the groups being studied."⁸ There are dangers in over-identification with the persons whose practices we study, as I indicated in the introduction. The inability to separate one's own experience from that of the persons or group being studied is, in my view, a sign of over-identification. But by speaking of "identification with," Davaney suggests that these authors work out of a kind of commitment that is based in their own recognition of or familiarity with the particular experience of the people whose faith is studied. Davaney argues that we should engage in ethnographic study not merely because it is interesting, or even because it has been neglected, but more importantly, "as a means of nurturing the creative, resisting, and transformative potential uncovered."⁹ It is in the spirit of caring for this "transformative potential," being invested in it and in the people themselves, that I engage in this work.

My analysis thus far, like Graham's, relies on the theoretical concepts of practice and *habitus*, as defined in the work of Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁰ In this chapter, I will proceed by defining and describing these concepts in relation to the function and meaning of the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Conclusion: Changing Conversation: Impetuses and Implications," in *Changing Conversations*, 261.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.

devotional practices that I have described in the previous chapters. Following Graham's methodology, I will then articulate some of the values that arise from these devotional practices, highlighting their pastoral and transformative dimensions. These values will be offered not as absolute or unanimous norms in the community, but as examples of the lived wisdom through which Italian Catholics and their descendants in San Pedro have cultivated "divine possibility."¹¹ These values are assumed to be contested and fluid rather than consistent or fixed. Nevertheless, they represent glimpses of the practical wisdom frequently embodied in and/or articulated by the devout in this setting.

Practice

Elaine Graham's understanding of practice follows that of Pierre Bourdieu.¹²

Practice is structured behavior that follows certain rules or patterns. It is purposeful activity performed by persons who are "both the subjects of agency and the objects of history." Graham writes, "Members of society contribute to the active construction of the social order: but they are simultaneously situated in a world of pre-existing structures, representations, and conventions."¹³

The devotional practices that I have described in San Pedro include numerous examples of purposeful activities that follow certain rules or patterns. The practice of looking at religious art and artifacts, described in chapter two, helps to illustrate this concept. This activity is purposeful in that the devout choose to direct their gaze toward

¹¹ Graham, 209.

¹² Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

¹³ Graham, 98.

any one of a myriad of saints, or to restrict it, as some do, to a particular representation of Mary or to the crucifix in church. The donation of works of art such as the large marble statue of Mary holding a purse seiner also illustrates purpose and agency—in this case, the agency of the laity in shaping the visual environment of the public worship space. The significance of this practice of donating artifacts should not be under-estimated.¹⁴ In homes as well, we saw evidence of purposeful decisions regarding the choice and number of religious images. In some homes, these images were plentiful, as in the case of the woman who described her home by saying, “Everywhere you turn you see God.” In other homes the use of images was more discreet, confined to a holy card on a bedroom mirror or a single brass crucifix at the back door of the home. People also chose the particular images they wanted placed in their line of vision, such as a patron saint from their town in Italy, or a portrait of Mary hanging over the bed. In the later generations, the combination of items from diverse religious traditions, such as the Native American dream catcher with portraits of guardian angels, demonstrates the range of purposeful and innovative ways in which visual piety is practiced. In these cases, the devotional piety is probably undergoing more profound change.¹⁵ In selecting artwork for their churches and homes,

¹⁴ Geographer Neil Smith writes: “The production of space also implies the production of meaning, concepts and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production.” Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (New York: Blackwell, 1984), cited in Chidester and Linenthal, 12.

¹⁵ Chidester and Linenthal write, “The strategy of hybridization, found in practices of mixing, fusing, or transgressing conventional spatial relations, presents ‘the possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself*.’” Introduction, 19, citing Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 58.

individuals influence the make-up of both ecclesiastic and domestic spaces, thus contributing to the ongoing construction of the social order.

At the same time, all of these persons are also “situated in a world of pre-existing structures, representations, and conventions.”¹⁶ In this sense, the practice or habit of visual piety is not entirely chosen. This practice has a given quality because the habit of looking at pictures of Mary or the saints has been so regular. The practice is so prevalent that it can be considered a formative influence on children from the time of their birth, reinforced in home and church and school, as well as through gift-giving for key life-cycle celebrations, such as Confirmations, graduations, or weddings. In these settings, it is not possible to escape seeing or “being seen” by these representations. The emotional import of these religious images and their conservative power are underscored by their association with beloved parents or grandparents, with natal lands, and with the sacralized new land. Thus, this religious practice is both purposeful as well as structured or regulated by pre-existing conventions. The devout and their children and grandchildren may hold onto items such as rosaries, relics, or holy cards, or let go of them. Nevertheless, they will sometimes find themselves held by memories, ideas, and impressions of the holy that seem to have a pre-existent, unchanging quality.

Habitus

When religious practices such as visual piety or ritual processions become regular or habitual, they constitute features of the *habitus*. After reviewing others’ use of this

¹⁶ Graham., 98.

term, Graham suggests that Bourdieu's definition of the *habitus* is the most helpful: "The *habitus*—embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product."¹⁷ Again, when we think of the pervasive presence of images of the saints in homes and in church, and comments that the devout made such as, "It's just the way it was—I didn't think about it," we can get a good sense of the *habitus* in this setting. The *habitus* also encompasses other aspects of the sense-worlds of Italian Catholics in San Pedro: the sights of fishing boats along the shore, and views of the shoreline itself (Figure 41 and Figure 42), reminiscent for some of Naples or nearby islands; the smells of fish or pasta cooking; the sounds of Italian dialects being spoken or favorite hymns to Mary being sung. When these familiar sights and sounds are bound up with religious practices, they help to convey and reinforce religious bonds through bodily memories and shared social experiences.

But the *habitus* is not fixed or final. Building on Bourdieu, Graham writes, "*Habitus* is thus conceived as the residuum of past actions, a deposit of past knowledge and practice, but which is always available as the raw material for creative agency or 'regulated improvisations.'"¹⁸ Devotional practices in this setting show themselves to be both the residuum of past actions, yet always changing, changing even in the process of reproduction. The devotion to Saint Joseph is a good example of both the conservative and open-ended features of the *habitus*. The leaders of Saint Joseph's Society emphasize

¹⁷ Ibid., 102-03.

¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

that their ritual feast is a “tradition,” firmly rooted in the oldest Sicilian ritual. At the same time, the current San Pedro feast also incorporates certain “regulated improvisations.” The fancy lights surrounding the saint are one example of a contemporary improvisation. The Italian band that plays both Italian and American national anthems is another. Both of these anthems are, of course, laden with emotional significance to the immigrants. The translocative quality of the immigrants’ religion, the way in which faith functions as bridge between the old land and the new, is particularly evident in this use of music. Nationalistic sentiments have been easily grafted into the religious “tradition,” giving it more emotional power. This innovation is made with ease, perhaps because these sentiments “fit” with the conservative nature of the ritual, offering a sense of rootedness that the immigrants crave, and re-affirming older values such as loyalty, order, and obedience. The use of national anthems in the religious tradition is both new and old. It is not only improvisational, but also regulated.

It becomes apparent that though the *habitus* is not fixed, it is sturdy. Bourdieu calls it the “durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations.”¹⁹ Graham adds: “Culture is constructed and maintained via human practices; and practice is also the medium by which moral values are articulated and enshrined.”²⁰ Traditional values, such as the love of country, or the authority of the priest, are enshrined in the Saint Joseph ritual, thus revealing and reinforcing a hierarchical social order. At the same time, participants in this ritual are individuals who have left a country they loved, and who at

¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 57.

²⁰ Graham, 98.

times challenge or at least disregard the authority of the priest. The *habitus* and its conventions are constantly being challenged and resisted, but the residuum of past knowledge is weighty. The power of social structure is in tension with the individual and collective human agency of the immigrants and their descendants.

“Transforming Practice”

So how does change take place? What makes pastoral transformation possible? Importantly for Graham, “engagement in new practices gives rise to new knowledge.”²¹ She describes how this kind of change can happen in relationship to two kinds of knowledge: first, in the acquiring of a new technical skill or bodily knowledge (such as learning to play a musical instrument or learning to swim), hence the phrase, “practice makes perfect”; and secondly, in realms of the spiritual or emotional, such as when one reads a poem or listens to a story, and new insights emerge that may transform future experience. Graham says, “Practice may be intrinsically disclosive of new realms of understanding.”²² Religious practices can give way to new insights, new theologies.

In San Pedro, an illustration of such transformation is found in the story of Matthew (Chapters 2 and 4), whose discovery of the writings of the Dalai Lama in high school led him to engage in the new practice of Buddhist meditation. This practice subsequently disclosed new realms of meaning, expanding his view of God, and inspiring a different understanding of his Catholic practices as well. But note that even in this case, the *habitus* is “durably installed.” While Matthew’s world-view and devotional practices

²¹ Graham., 99.

²² Ibid., 99-100.

have expanded enormously, he still experiences them as tied to the strong faith and identity that he absorbed from his parents and grandparents. His practice of visual piety has been altered, but not replaced, by Buddhist practices, as the large complex altar in his living demonstrates (Figures 27-29). The Dalai Lama is pictured there with Thomas Merton, whose writings Matthew first learned of through his grandmother. The durable quality of Matthew's *habitus* can also be seen in his commitment to a religious feeding ministry, though the fact that he instituted this program at Trinity Church rather than Mary Star, the church he grew up in, is another example of regulated improvisation.

Matthew's ties to the *habitus* of his youth help make his adult innovations so compelling. This recalls Winnicott's comment, noted in Chapter 2: "In any cultural field, it is not possible to be original except on the basis of tradition." The ability to be, in Graham's words, "creative, subversive, inspirational or prophetic," does not come outside of our personal and social historical situations but through our engagement with them.

But how do we engage with our traditions in life-giving ways? Elaine Graham suggests that certain features of religious practices function as "bearers of the living principles of hope and obligation."²³ By this, she does not mean to suggest a new set of *a priori* moral principles that can be used to "enforce moral conformity."²⁴ At the same time, she does not want to "abandon completely any notion of pastoral discipline or Christian perfection."²⁵ Instead, as I understand her, Graham is calling for critical

²³ Graham, 111.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-09. Graham expands on this construction in chap. 6, 112-41.

reflection and interpretation of the community's situated knowledge of God. This kind of reflection can help identify the community's resources that pull in the direction of hope and obligation, "by which the building up of the faithful may be guided."²⁶ So we must ask, in our phenomenology of practice, questions such as: How are healing and redemption experienced and/or prefigured?²⁷ What are the "horizons of value" imbedded in these particular Christian (or any) religious practices?²⁸ Are these values appropriate for the complexity and diversity of human experience in this setting? What leads to (discloses) transformation? What is foreclosed by these practices and shared values?

Practical Wisdom in San Pedro

With these understandings and these questions in mind, we will now turn to the task of naming some of the "practical wisdom" that arises out of the Italian devotional practices in San Pedro. What are the "effects and traces of God" that the devotional practices suggest?²⁹ I hesitate to use the term "values," given past trends in immigration history that saw "cultural values" or "cultural characteristics" as fixed attributes of various ethnic and national groups.³⁰ For lack of a better term, however, I will refer to situated values or values arising from practice. Three such situated values arising from practice that I noted frequently in my data are: connection, multiplicity, and celebration.

²⁶ Ibid., 208.

²⁷ Ibid., 209.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 207.

³⁰ di Leonardo, *Varieties of Ethnic Experience*.

Connection

The first and most prevalent “bearer of hope and obligation” that I see arising from the devotional practices is a sense of the importance of spiritual and interpersonal connection. The significance of this situated value is evident in the large proportion of time, money, loyalty, and energy given to relationships among the devout and God, Mary, and/or the angels and saints. It is also evident in the extremely intense and regular social and familial interchanges that the devotional practices entail.

The habit of maintaining such close spiritual and interpersonal connections is owing in part to the historical exigencies of immigration and the fishing occupation, and the resulting heightened needs for emotional, spiritual, and practical support. We have also seen how religious art and artifacts, both in form and in function, emphasize and promulgate this value. The sharing of food, at regular family meals, hospitable coffee breaks, large-scale saints’ day feasts, fund-raising dinners, as well as in pastoral feeding programs, all express and re-enforce this value. All of these influences can be viewed as contributing to the habit of intense spiritual and interpersonal connection, which is clearly now enshrined as a value in this setting. This value is evident in the religious reflections and practices of men as well as women. It is especially clear in the stories of those from the first two generations, and it remains an important value to those persons that I interviewed from the third and fourth generations.

Several of the women’s stories already related here demonstrate how both spiritual and interpersonal connections function as pastoral (in the sense of healing and/or

sustaining) resources for the devout. One example is the story of Joy, the immigrant fisherman's wife, described in Chapter 3, whose close ties to the saints and to her friends and relatives helped her navigate the difficult experiences of her husband's two accidents at sea, and her own brushes with life-threatening illness. Joy's way of living "in connection" has afforded her considerable social support as well as spiritual peace. Because the practice of her devotional faith as she understands it requires Joy to help other immigrants as much as she can, her strong social network is continuously renewed. One benefit of Joy's practice of connection is the reciprocity of care that she experiences within her religious circle of friends. She reports that when she was hospitalized with cancer, her room was filled with cards and flowers. This experience was gratifying to her, and it seems to have encouraged her in her healing process.

Joy's prayer-life, too, supplies a sense of connection and care. Through regular prayer and Bible reading, aided by numerous religious images, Joy has found a way to manage and endure a great deal of uncertainty and fear. Beyond endurance or survival, she seems to have hewn out of her years of devotion a trustful disposition. This may have been a feature of her disposition early on, but more apparent to me is the sense that this is something Joy has practiced. She seems to have internalized, taken into her personality, the grace that she experiences in relationship to God, Mary, and the saints. Thus the value of spiritual and interpersonal connections for Joy is enormous. The practical wisdom of kindness and the reciprocity of care that Joy experiences in these relationships "hold her" in times of crisis and beyond.

The value of spiritual and interpersonal connection is also evident in the story of Sarah, the third-generation woman who is recovering from domestic abuse. Sarah's story also demonstrates change and innovation. She does not attend Mass regularly or hold as tightly to the devotional practices in the way that Joy does. Nevertheless, her story bears witness to the help that she draws from a strong sense of connection to God and to her family of origin. Sarah credits her connection to God with her survival of her overdose when she relates, "Something inside me told me to tell my ex-husband what I'd done."³¹ When Sarah was finally able to leave her abusive spouse, she came home to a neighborhood filled with relatives and friends. She reports her gratitude for the strong social support her family has provided. Sarah also uses her various religious artifacts as well as prayer and meditation in order to continue to nurture her sense of spiritual connection. We have already noted that Judith Herman's influential work on trauma and recovery indicates that a sense of connection is one of the two most important experiences in the recovery process.³² Sarah, a youngest child who grew up with strong ties to her large family, and with an intensely devout mother, embodies the habit of connection. This is a kind of practical knowledge, a resource that Sarah has been able to draw upon both during her ordeal and in her ongoing healing work.

To hold up connection as a positive and life-giving pastoral value in this setting does not require us to idealize this feature of the *habitus* or ignore its ambiguity. Indeed, many of those interviewed alluded to various problems with the strong emphasis that is

³¹ Interview #29.

³² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

placed on relationship. The imperative toward marriage (and marriage to another Catholic, preferably an Italian) is one example of the invidious quality that the ideology of strong religious, familial, and social connections can take on. We might ask whether the value placed on marriage as an almost inviolable connection contributed to or influenced Sarah's experience of domestic abuse. Did this value cause her to stay in the abusive relationship longer? It is hard to know the answer to these questions, though Sarah did volunteer that when she confided her situation of abuse to a priest, he assured her that she would be eligible for an annulment.³³

It is also important to ask the question about who is excluded from the strong bonds of connection that are so valued in this setting. One second-generation woman certainly experienced disconnection when she chose to marry a previously divorced man forty years ago. At that time, she was excommunicated for doing this and not allowed to marry in the church. She remembers how much it hurt her father, a deeply religious man, that he could not see his daughter married in the church he loved. The woman also lost out on regular interpersonal connections to the church community. These connections might have benefited her in later years, when she endured a period of emotional stress and marital difficulty.³⁴

Another question that so much close connection raises is regarding what happens to those who want out, or to those who find such connections stifling.³⁵ Indeed, many

³³ Interview #29.

³⁴ Interview #4.

³⁵ Unfortunately, one of the limitations of my research sample is that by interviewing the devout, I missed out on hearing many stories of the disaffected. While I tried to gain interviews with children and

family therapists might view the strong sense of connection and obligation within these families as being unhealthy. In the jargon of family therapy, the favorite word is "enmeshed." The devout could very well be judged enmeshed in their relationships with Mary, the saints, the church, their families, and friends. Of course, the enmeshed diagnosis is controversial, because it is seen by some as a pejorative label used to pathologize the experience of both women and members of diverse cultural and ethnic groups.³⁶ But it is still valid to ask whether the habit of close connection, that carries a sense of so much obligation to regular interaction with family and friends, does not absorb individuals' time and energy to the detriment of their more creative or unique personal endeavors.

We have seen how historically, the habit of close social and spiritual connections helped Italian immigrants in this setting to survive, not only emotionally but also practically. Immigrants' stories of poverty, illness, and hardship suggest that the practice of mutual connection and obligation arose in the context of the struggle to survive. In light of this, it is not surprising that familial and social connections would become valued over time. Bourdieu might say this is a case of necessity becoming a virtue. In the situation of extreme poverty, we might concur that strong familial and social connection

grandchildren of the devout stressing that I wanted to talk to them whether they were religious or not. I suspect that some of the persons who declined interviews might have offered revealing insights on this subject.

³⁶ McGoldrick, Anderson, and Walsh, 10; Celia Jaes Falicov, "The Cultural Meaning of Family Triangles," in *Re-Visioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture, and Gender in Clinical Practice*, ed. Monica McGoldrick (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 38-39.

is a necessity. But is this a virtue that continues to function in a positive and life-giving way? The folks I interviewed seem to suggest that it is.

The strong spiritual and social connections that I observed among women did not surprise me as much as did those of the men. These connections are evident in the relatively high level of male participation in religious rituals, societies, and retreats. For example, I witnessed the participation of surprisingly large numbers of men at Sunday Mass (the pastor estimated a sixty-forty ratio of women to men), at fundraising dinners, church rituals and feasts, and in religious societies. Some of these societies, such as the Knights of Columbus, have entirely male memberships. The local chapter of the Italian Catholic Federation (ICF) includes both men and women, but men have dominated its leadership for many years. Though I found fewer men than women who were willing to be interviewed, those who did talk with me spoke enthusiastically about their spiritual, familial, and social connections.

I interviewed one immigrant who is a twenty-year past president of the ICF. He proudly showed me several plaques honoring him for his service, which are displayed on a hallway wall in his home. "Sal" is an immigrant from Ischia. He is retired now, age seventy-three, well-known and liked among his peers. Sitting with his wife and me around their kitchen table, Sal was warm, open, and poignant. He spoke in a way that I would describe as simultaneously casual and intimate. "Religion," he said, "is like a good cup of coffee. If you don't have it, you miss it."³⁷

³⁷ Interview #6.

Over a good cup of coffee, he told me more. Having grown up on a vineyard, Sal made his living grafting fruit trees. He immigrated first to Canada, where he earned enough money to bring his first wife here to San Pedro in 1953. After only a few years in this country, his wife died of cancer, leaving Sal with three children. He was devastated emotionally and financially, going “in debt down to my shoes” to pay for her funeral. He and his children moved in with a brother during the worst part of the crisis. His devotions increased during this period. Some years later, he met and married his present wife, Ella, who was a widow with four children of her own in 1969. The two families connected in a way that both adults are proud of. Sal says of finding Ella, “It was a relief for me and a blessing for my kids.” He adds with tears in his eyes, “God was good to me. My first wife was very, very good. And the second one is even better.” “Thank you,” Ella adds quietly, looking surprised.

Sal’s spiritual connections are also important to him. Saint John-Joseph of the Cross, the patron Saint of Ischia and the ICF, is one recipient of his prayers. The saint’s statue resides on a home altar. “The saints are our lawyers,” Sal offers. “They intercede for us. They have more connection with God. They are closer to him.”³⁸ But Sal seems fairly well connected himself. It is his habit to spend approximately two and one-half hours praying in the sanctuary of Mary Star church prior to attending Mass each morning. He says of this, “It’s the best time I spend in the whole day. Then I have breakfast, and

³⁸ Ibid.

then I take my walk.” Sal’s religious practice is clearly a priority in his life, as well as something he enjoys.

Sal’s interview reveals the extent and depth of his devotion. In the course of our time together, he recites and sings, in Italian, some of his regular prayers to Saint John-Joseph. These prayers emphasize the saint’s patronage of all the children of Ischia, wherever they may be.³⁹ Sal speaks at length about prayer, its meaning and help in his life, and about the mysteries of the rosary—joyful, sorrowful, and glorious. In the course of our conversation, he seems to take on each of these moods in turn. Finally, he gives his own rendition of the golden rule: “Be human. Grow as a human. Treat you fellow man justa like youself [treat your fellow man just like yourself].”⁴⁰

In their book *The Healing Connection*,⁴¹ Wellesley College’s Stone Center theorists Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver articulate a vision of psychological maturity that is based on growth-fostering relationships. In this relational approach to psychological theory, “the goal of development is not forming a separated self or finding gratification, but something else altogether—the ability to participate actively in

³⁹ A portion of the “Responsorio” that Sal sings reads in translation.

“Reign with God in heaven, O Saint John-Joseph
Our fellow citizen, Pride and boast of Ischia...
O illustrious Isclano and saint. Let your blessing fall
On our native land which bestows honors on you
O our great Patron
From our bodies and from our souls
Keep away all evils
Guide, sustain, and save.
Those who sail the seas . . . ”

“S. Giovan Giuseppe Della Croce: Coroncina Al Santo,” pamphlet, 8.

⁴⁰ Interview #6.

⁴¹ Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver, *The Healing Connection: How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and in Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

relationships that foster the well-being of everyone involved.”⁴² Sal’s devotional life seems to inspire him toward achieving a kind of growth-in-connection that these authors would applaud.

Immigrants such as Sal remember times of poverty that fueled the need for close connections. Now that most of them are enjoying times of relative ease, they still hold on to their social and spiritual connections. Through religious societies such as ICF, they continuously renew relationships in a social circle of devout immigrants. Beyond this, though, they also practice charitable activities that connect them to a larger ethnic and religious community. Participation in ICF, for example, links the devout to a nationwide Italian Catholic population. This organization raises funds to support various cultural and charitable causes, such as scholarships for students in Italian Studies programs, and medical research and treatment of Thalassemia, a genetic form of anemia that affects persons of Mediterranean descent.⁴³ These activities and these causes keep Sal connected on many levels.

We might appreciate Sal’s religious practices as “translocative,” in that by venerating Saint John-Joseph, his “fellow Isclano,” he can imaginatively cross back and forth over the sea to the island where he was born. On the other hand, through his involvement with ICF, an American Catholic organization, Sal reconstitutes himself, to some degree, as a pan-Italian American, and not just an Isclano. Through his connections

⁴² Ibid., 22.

⁴³ “About the Italian Catholic Federation,” *Bollettino: Monthly Newspaper of the Italian Catholic Federation* (Oakland, California), Feb. 2000, 3. The reader may also wish to view the ICF website: *Italian Catholic Federation*, <<http://www.ICF.org>>.

and charitable activities associated with ICF, Sal's network of belonging and his opportunities for faithful service have expanded.

Judith Jordan, another Stone Center theorist, writes: "Our perspective appreciates that people experience a sense of personal history, and coherence: . . . we see context, the ongoing relational interplay between self and other, as primary to real growth and vitality."⁴⁴ The devotional practices that Sal and other immigrants and their children participate in seem to help the devout maintain a sense of personal history and coherence through "ongoing relational interplay" in spiritual, spatial, and interpersonal fields.

An additional important pastoral aspect of the value of connection in this setting has to do with the way in which a consciousness of the needs of the poor and especially the hungry is maintained. The feeding ministries of the various churches (described in Chapter 4) embody this value and habit of connection. The memory of poverty and hunger, especially as it is enshrined in Saint Joseph's Table feasts, nurtures a sense of commonality with members of the poorest classes, by recalling the struggle to survive an ancient famine. This ritual associates the needs of the local poor—in San Pedro and throughout Los Angeles—with memories (real and imagined) of struggling parents, grandparents, friends and neighbors, both here in San Pedro and back in Italian homelands. The sense of historical continuity and ethnic identity that is forged and reformed in these rituals incorporates an obligation to feed the hungry.

⁴⁴ Judith Jordan, "Do You Believe that the Concepts of Self and Autonomy Are Useful in Understanding Women?" in Jean Baker Miller, Judith Jordan, Alexandra Kaplan, Irene Stiver, and Janet Surrey, "Some Misconceptions and Reconceptions of a Relational Approach," *Work in Progress*, No. 49 (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center Working Paper Series, 1991), 5, cited in Miller and Stiver, 56.

From a pastoral-theological standpoint, we could and perhaps should question religious feeding ministries that do not go beyond charitable relief to the work of advocacy and social transformation. Do such programs inadvertently help to maintain unjust social structures that cause poverty to begin with? Are these ministries merely stopgap measures that help maintain a capitalistic structure that requires an underclass? Though I cannot fully answer these questions here, I want to stress that these ministries address needs for food that are critical and emergent. In San Pedro, where thousands of new immigrants continue to make their homes, and recent welfare reform legislation makes it difficult if not impossible for immigrants to receive government aid, these food distribution programs are critical. The devout who recall their own immigrant struggles with poverty know the urgency of current immigrants' financial needs.

The significant value that I want to lift up in this setting is the sense of connection to and identification with the hungry that fuels these ministries. This is not charity from a distance, accomplished by writing a check, but human interaction. Rocco, from chapter four, experienced a physical sensation that he interpreted as the Holy Spirit alerting him to the needs of the homeless standing on the corner of 19th and Pacific Avenue. This sense of connection comes from the habit of involvement and friendship with the poor, which is hard for Rocco in one way—recall his earlier comments about “druggies and winos”—but easy for him in another, because of his family’s history of a struggle to survive. Rocco has said that he is sure God is calling him to do this work. Rocco confided that he would have liked to be ordained as a deacon in the Catholic Church, but

he could not pursue this because he lacks a college degree. Instead, he fulfills his intense sense of being called—chosen and saved from that boating accident at age fourteen—through relationships to those whose lives he may be helping to save. It is important to see the energy for ministry that Rocco and others in this setting derive from their personal and religious histories.

The value of connection as it is enshrined in these devotional practices is still, of course, open to debate. I have noted examples of the ways in which strong spiritual and interpersonal connections have been experienced as healing, supportive, oriented toward psycho-spiritual growth, and conducive to engagement in Christian ministry. Others might view this emphasis on connection as limiting, too focused on security. They may see connection functioning as a form of dependence rather than leading to growth-inspiring relationships that can empower people to work for social change.

Robert Orsi artfully described this tension in relation to his study of American women's devotion to Saint Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes. The ambiguity of the devotions lies in this point exactly, whether the practices foster growth in the devout or the qualities of passivity and dependence. in Orsi's words, "capitulation, resignation, and self-delusion."⁴⁵ Orsi finds some truth in the latter assessment. For American women struggling to work through difficult situations in the context of cultural limitations, "Jude," he writes, "turns out to be Judas after all."⁴⁶ Yet, Orsi finally points to the ambiguity of this judgment when he describes his overall impressions of the actual

⁴⁵ Orsi. *Thank You, Saint Jude*. 193.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

women who participated in the devotion. He finds that even those who give Jude the credit for much of what they themselves have done, speaking the language of humility and dependence, do not embody or live out a passive orientation to life.⁴⁷ Orsi concludes, “The challenge here is to consider how it could be that intimacy and dependence . . . could apparently be the ground of action, choice, autonomy, and healing, for that is what was in the historical record of the cult’s narratives.”⁴⁸ Orsi goes on to explore not only the ambiguity of the graces that the devotion yields to women, but also the possibility that the very dependence and intimacy that devotion fosters might actually be related to its transformative aspects.

I suspect that the strong emphasis on connection in the devotional practices in San Pedro may function in similarly complex ways. In this setting there are many women, in particular, who profess a great sense of humility in relation to the saints. I think of Anna (Chapter 4), who shies away from taking public credit for her organizing role in Saint Joseph’s Table feasts, even while asserting herself mightily in practice. “I’m not the president,” she demurs. “I run it. I tell people what to do.”⁴⁹ And then there is Susan, who brought up her children with liberal dousings of holy water, blessed by the priest. But according to Susan’s daughter, when her mom ran out of holy water, she would simply bless more tap water herself. “Why not?” Susan said to me. “We’re saints too.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ One woman, for example, was an 89-year-old writing from the *independent care* floor of the nursing home about how Jude keeps her going, although she tries to help herself first. Ibid., 197-98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁹ Interview #7.

⁵⁰ Interview #21.

This self-confidence is quite striking. I wonder if some of this confidence actually comes from practicing the devotions, in the sense that after practicing anything for a while, one can get a sense of mastery and skill. Maybe Susan's lifelong practice of devotions has yielded a cumulative sense of authority that gives her confidence in her own practical wisdom. She knows how to give a blessing; she can consecrate holy water herself.

Is there a link between the comfort and security inherent in close spiritual and interpersonal connections enshrined in the devotions and the subversive energy—such as Anna's and Susan's—that moves beyond passivity, humility, or conformity? Is it when the devout's defensive needs are met, whether through faith in her connections in the supernatural world (i.e., Susan's identification with the saints), or through the support of a closely connected family or society (Anna's secure place in the Saint Joseph's Society), that the freedom to improvise, resist, or subvert is gained?

I wondered what the current pastor of Mary Star, Monsignor Patrick Gallagher, would think about these things. I asked him what he thought the devotions meant, and whether they were more a source of comfort or transformation. His reply was both quick and telling:

We obviously put Jesus first. The saints are models that lead us to him. And the greatest model of all is his mother. Jesus must be first. He is the Son of God and He is God. Our religion eventually calls us to transformation. The life of Jesus invokes and calls us to a deeper union with our Lord. In times of crisis, yes, the saints are a comfort. But we need both. We have a need to grow and mature in the faith and in life.⁵¹

⁵¹ Informational interview #06.

The pastor's careful answer expresses the official post-Vatican II Catholic interpretation of the role of the saints as models that lead us to Jesus. This includes a reminder that Jesus is "first," needed here because not all of the devout exactly see it—or practice it—that way. But along with the pastor's theologically correct answer, which he offered hastily and a bit defensively, I think, came a very sensitive interpretation of the need for both comfort and transformation, and even a hint that there might be a connection between the two.

It seems to me that the emphasis on connection in these devotions is indeed a comfort to many in this setting where there is so much history of crisis, loss, and change. These experiences have been woven into the immigrants' religious and ethnic identity, and passed on in varying degrees to their children and grandchildren. It is therefore not surprising that strong habits of spiritual and social connection would persist and continue to be cherished. But will these connections foster security to the detriment of growth? Father Gallagher, an immigrant himself, patiently works the balance. He sees continuity between his pastoral goals of comfort and transformation.

I suspect, as these others have intimated, that the two are connected. I suspect that it is the intimacy and security of close connections in devotional practices that often makes way for creativity and change. But how does this link work exactly? In order to press on with this analysis, we will examine a second value that arises from the practice of devotions in this setting. It has to do with interconnections between and among Italians from various places and members of other immigrant and ethnic groups in San

Pedro, particularly at Mary Star of the Sea Parish. I call this value “multiplicity,” though I like better the term that Anna (Chapter 4) used. She called it “minestrone.”

Multiplicity and Minestrone

As I noted in Chapter two, a striking multiplicity of religious images, in the form of statues, mosaics, and stained glass windows, occupy the sanctuary at Mary Star of the Sea church. The list of representations totals thirty, and it includes such notables as Saint Anthony, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of the Assumption, and Saint Patrick, to name just a few. In the course of my research in San Pedro, I was continually surprised to learn of people’s devotion to an ever-expanding pantheon of saints, angels, and various manifestations of the Madonna, as well as the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The list grew to include more and more names, some familiar to me—such as Our Lady of Fatima, Saint Teresa, Padre Pio and Mother Cabrini, and some more obscure. This list includes: the Madonna del Ponte, the Virgin of the Bridge; Saint Lucy, patron saint of the blind; Santo Vito, the keeper of the dogs; Saint Dymphia, who is said to be “good for” peace of mind and to prevent mental illness; San Genaro; San Trifone; Maria Del Lume, Patrona di Porticello; San Pasquale, protector of the deaf (who has now been removed from the Vatican’s official list of saints); and the Madonna de Porto Salvo, Our Lady of the Wharf, among others.

In the course of my interview with Anna, who is primarily devoted to Saint Joseph, I commented on this multiplicity of saints. Anna had been going on at great length about the many diverse ethnic groups at her church, and their corresponding

devotions to patron saints from around the world. She told me that she is always willing to help out with the other devotions, assuring me that she prays to the Madonna as well as Saint Joseph. When Anna showed me a picture of the Madonna del Ponte—Our Lady of the Bridge—the patron Saint of Trapani, Sicily, who is known for performing many miracles, I expressed my amazement over the sheer number of saints I was encountering. In a flourish of theological clarity, Anna intoned, “It’s like a minestrone. We’re a minestrone. We all mix together.”

Anna’s metaphor is apt. Here is a good example of the agency and competency of ordinary people in interpreting their own religious culture. To begin with, her use of a food metaphor (like Sal’s reference to a good cup of coffee) expresses a complex idea in a simple and direct way that appeals to gustatory sensations. The metaphor of minestrone is also apt in that it differs from the notorious melting pot, in that the various vegetables in a minestrone do not merge or melt—they’re not pureed. In a good minestrone, flavors tend to mingle and gradually influence each other. They become, over time, something different from what they were at first. This mingling of flavors is analogous to what Catherine Albanese calls “contact and combination,” in reference to religious mixing in America.⁵² When Anna used the term “minestrone” to describe her community at Mary Star, she was referring, I think, to both ethnic and devotional mixing. Her comments made me wonder if there might be some connection between the two.

⁵² Catherine Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls: Contact, Combination, and American Religious History,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of Calif. Press, 1997), 200–26.

What actually happens to the devout over time in the practice of devotions to a multiplicity of saints? For one thing, I suspect that the devout at Mary Star of the Sea have been entertaining through their practice a notion of divine multiplicity. Of course, the pastor and others argue that the saints are not God, but mere models that point people toward God. Nevertheless, for many whose practices we have been excavating here, Mary and the saints do seem to function as though they were God, or at least very close relatives. In this practice of engaging intimately with one or more diverse saints, the multiplicity of the divine becomes known, understood at a primary level. At the same time, a view of the world as complex and multiple may be apprehended. Devotion in the context of a multiplicity of saints then opens the way for some of the devout to appreciate the value of human diversity. Thus Anna's comment about the multiplicity of saints: "It's like a minestrone; we're a minestrone." The habit of engaging a variety of supernatural beings leads at least some of the devout to develop a capacity to appreciate a variety of human beings. Anna helps out with other groups' devotions not only because she enjoys them but because she recognizes them as familiar, related to her own experience of God.

Historical processes have also helped habituate the devout to the presence of human diversity in their religious community. As we saw in chapter three, immigrants from many countries have been sharing the Mary Star of the Sea parish for many years. Since its beginning in 1889, when a French priest was called to minister to a group of mostly Italian and Croatian fisherman and their families, Mary Star has been a multi-ethnic congregation. Each of these immigrant groups, including many regional

subgroups, brought with them traditions of devotion to their own particular saints. The pastors of Mary Star adopted the practical strategy of encouraging these groups to join the church and form their own societies within it. Pastors also incorporated into the sanctuary diverse artifacts from the immigrants' native lands.

Though the influential pastor George Scott expressed the hope of Americanization—that the parish would become one in both language and system—this vision of unity never completely took hold at Mary Star. Instead, the number of various small groups within the church continued to grow; it is thirty-two by last count. Not all of these societies and choirs are based in ethnic identities or devoted to saints from particular lands. But many of them are. And as the church continues to incorporate new groups of immigrants, additional societies are continuously formed. Even among Italians who have been members of Mary Star for many years, two new societies have been recently added, including the San Pietro Society, founded in 1996; and the Trapetto Club, started in 1990.⁵³ In recent years, new waves of immigrants from Mexico have settled in San Pedro, invigorating the devotions to Our Lady of Guadalupe and inspiring the formation of the Hermandad Catolica Hispanoamericana de Mary Star of the Sea. Recently, large numbers of Filipinos have also been immigrating, and for a time, a Filipino priest was brought on the staff. As more saints and more immigrants appear at Mary Star, the *habitus* has been able to absorb them into a structure that “naturally” (and seemingly effortlessly) opens up another space for another devotion.

⁵³ These organizations depend on the leadership of persons who are themselves immigrants.

The paradoxical strategy of honoring distinctions in ethnic identity has resulted in a kind of unity in the parish. Though George Scott's vision of amalgamated unity never fully took hold, another vision of unity did. Monsignor Gallagher, the pastor since 1985, has through his sermons and weekly bulletins taken on the topics of prejudice, tolerance, and discrimination.⁵⁴ He has called for Christian unity, even as he has continued to encourage the proliferation of new societies. Gallagher, perhaps because he is an immigrant himself, seems to understand the arduous struggle that immigration can entail. By encouraging groups to pursue the treasured devotional traditions of their natal lands, involving food, dress, language, and celebrations, he has helped to facilitate an important form of communal pastoral care for immigrants: giving them space in which to locate themselves symbolically and socially. These multiple "spaces" allow for devotions to take place alongside of each other, just as images of diverse saints in the sanctuary occupy separate altars alongside each other. In the practice of sharing and negotiating a devotional calendar and/or a sacred space, such as the church auditorium, the devout from various groups come into regular contact and religious interchange. While this habit of contact hasn't dispelled all of the tensions between, within, or among groups, I do think it has helped open up the cultural consciousness of the devout, and given them opportunities to come to know and appreciate each other.

The ethnic saints, and the societies devoted to them, have in turn done their part to help support the parish. The church is currently involved in a fund-raising campaign to

⁵⁴ See, for example, Patrick Gallagher, "Pastor's Corner - Discrimination," *Mary Star of the Sea Parish Weekly Bulletin*, 4 June 2000.

support the building of a new parish-sponsored high school, the total cost of which is estimated at the amazing sum of fifteen million dollars.⁵⁵ The cost of phase one, half of that sum, has already been raised. Among the many creative fund-raising strategies currently employed, is a challenge to the various church societies to pledge a significant sum of money. The average pledge per society is \$25,000. In order to raise this kind of money, the societies regularly host fund-raising dinners, travel tours, bake-sales, and raffles. Needless to say, the amount of time and money that the devout earn and contribute is enormous. Additional large donations are being solicited from those willing to sponsor the purchase of a statue of a saint for a classroom in the new school. Thus the multiplicity of saints is pressed into the service of fundraising. This demonstrates the way in which the shared meanings, habits, and images enshrined in devotional practices can function, on a very practical and material level, to preserve religious structures.

The presence of multi-ethnic saints and societies has gradually given way to more relaxed boundaries between and among ethnic groups. "Here we have the unity," said one of my informants. She is an Italian married to a Croatian. Though it is more common to find inter-ethnic marriages among members of the third and later immigrant generations, it is clear that many Italians now have family members whose names end in "erez" or "itch." These interconnections represent a hard-won kind of unity, or perhaps a better adjective would be "slow-cooked." This unity has not developed overnight. Some

⁵⁵ "Breaking New Ground." *Mary Star of the Sea High School Capital Campaign Update* 3, no. 2, March 2000. To learn more about this project, the reader may wish to visit the website of *Mary Star of the Sea High School*, available at <<http://www.marystarhigh.com>>.

would say it hasn't developed enough at all, given that groups still routinely gather to pray, sing, or raise money separately a good deal of the time. But at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings at Mary Star, there is evidence of intercultural connection in the upbeat and intermingling crowd of worshipers. This Mass is said in English, and many in the diverse-looking crowd seem to be making connections, not only with God but also with each other.

This is not to claim that the church is free of ethnic or racial or other forms of interpersonal bias. For one thing, the pastor would not be preaching about these issues if he did not perceive them as problems. In my research, I was initially impressed more by a sense of unity than by any indications of prejudice or divisiveness. However, I did hear some critical comments about how the Latino population has run down the old neighborhoods, and even one disturbing racial epithet. In the case of the last, the man I was interviewing realized he had made a mistake, and asked me to erase the tape. My sense is that most people were probably trying to be on their best behavior during the interviews, and if they did have biases, they were not going to knowingly express them while the tape-recorder was on. Some peoples' comments expressed bias in an indirect way: "Some people say the Filipinos are taking over the church. That's what they're saying!"⁵⁶ Another bias was communicated inadvertently to me at the San Pietro fund-raising dinner, where there was much dancing going on. One woman at my table, who knew I was a researcher, pointed to two women who were dancing together, and said, "I

⁵⁶ Interview #24.

don't want you to think that they're gay, just because they're dancing together." There were other hints of prejudice related to sexual preference as well.

In spite of these painful problems, I think that the practice of devotions, at least for some of those whom I interviewed, does open up the possibility of a more complex and multifarious worldview. In San Pedro, the diverse saints, both human and supernatural, offer the community a glimpse of transcendence, one that is not fully seen or recognized yet. Just as the devout are accustomed to turning to different saints for different needs—Saint Anthony for lost items. Saint Jude for lost causes—they are also accustomed to seeing a diversity of ethnic celebrations, seeing a variety of skin colors, hearing the Mass in a variety of languages, and smelling and tasting a variety of ethnic foods. All of these activities happen in the church, and have for many years. While there is a tradition of competition between and among these various church organizations (a competition that probably helps fuel successful fundraising efforts), there is also a spirit of cooperation, or at the very least, grudging mutual respect. Multiplicity—or minestrone—is bubbling away at Mary Star. It has become an enduring feature of the *habitus*, one of which many of the devout are understandably proud.

Celebration and Vitality

The third value that I would like to excavate and explore in this setting is that of celebration and/or vitality. When I speak of celebration, I am referring to many things: the large-scale ritual celebrations that the devout plan, execute, and enjoy; the elaborate celebrations of life-cycle marking events, such as Baptisms, First Communions,

Confirmations, graduations, weddings, and funerals; and the smaller celebrations that bring meaning and moment to everyday interactions, such as the bouquet of flowers purchased for the saint, the intricate flavors of home-baked cookies, and the regular sense of celebration around meals with families and friends. I refer also to a feeling of celebration or vitality that comes across in many of my interviews in the form of humor, or the energy of delighted sharing. I remember enjoying this upbeat energy immensely during the actual research. I was surprised and gladdened to experience this vitality again when replaying the tapes to analyze them later.

The habit of celebration is notable in the practices described in each of the previous chapters. A sense of celebration or vitality is visible in the interesting array of sacred art both in church and in the homes of the devout. It is evident in the range of colors used in paintings or stained glass. The size and complexity of the various statues and artifacts, as well as the large sums of money that have been invested in them, are also indications of the enthusiasm that motivated their purchase. A penchant for celebration has also marked the devout's participation in the fishing industry, evident in the history of Fishermen's Fiestas and Blessings of the Fleet. Elaborate flowers, lights, and decorations, as well as colorful clothing and abundant consumption of ethnic foods, are the hallmarks of these events. Food itself is infused with religious meaning, prepared with care, and often served with a flourish of bountiful excess. The devotional practices are characterized by habits of excess: excess food, excess emotion, excess singing and dancing, excess generosity, excess life. There is something charged, vital, about the

devout and the excessive lengths to which they go in order to express themselves and their devotion.

This source of this intensity or tendency toward excess is related to the community's history of immigration and participation in fishing as an occupation. It was the struggle for economic survival that brought many immigrants to this country to begin with. The occupation of fishing, familiar to many families from their lives in Ischia or Sicily, drew these immigrants to the West Coast, where they enjoyed familiar landscapes and temperate climate. But the extremes of the fishing life and its attendant risks, losses, and fears contributed to the intensity and vigor of the prayers of the people. Because of the uncertainties related to fishing fortunes, accidents, and illnesses, the immigrants that I interviewed, their children, and their grandchildren have absorbed a frightening knowledge of the tenuous nature of life.

It is therefore not so surprising that a version of the fishermen's "live for today" bravado has become embodied in the devotional practices in San Pedro. Now, many of the immigrants and their children are well-off in their retirement years, with more wealth and leisure time than they had ever expected to attain. When they pray, they thank the saints both for their survival and for their surprising material ease. At the same time, the saints remind the devout of loved ones lost, of the fear and worry they felt as children, of the knowledge that nothing can be taken for granted. These are things that the devout both want to remember and want to forget. So they go at the devotions in a way resembling the manner of fishermen going into a bar after a long time away at sea. They

spend lavishly and forget about tomorrow. On saints' days, the devout do not just decorate, they adorn their surroundings with flowers and fabrics. They do not just pray, they perpetually adore. They do not just eat, they put on a feast and feed everybody in sight.

The vitality of the devout is evident in their daily rounds of duty as well as in their array of annual saints'-day feasts. Kathleen Greider, in *Reckoning with Aggression: Theology, Violence, and Vitality*, defines vitality as “. . . essential aliveness and life-affirmation, . . . human agency that manifests in passion and capacity to endure.”⁵⁷ In San Pedro, devotional practices have a ring of “essential aliveness and life-affirmation.” Perhaps this is because in practicing them, the devout have enhanced their capacity to endure in the face of fear and hardship. In the practice of regular prayer, focused on images of loving and powerful primary objects, the devout have used their agency to open up a transitional space, in which they do not have to accept all of the limits of the external world. In this transitional realm, the devout have been able to approach—go toward—the divine presence, with all of their fears, and all of their intense yearning to survive. This movement toward the saints might be linked to what Greider (following Winnicott) calls the “life force . . . part of the impulse to survive and thrive.”⁵⁸ These are different ways of talking about the aggressive impulse, which in Greider's view can be expressed negatively, as violence, or positively, as vitality or passion for living. Perhaps the vitality

⁵⁷ Kathleen J. Greider, *Reckoning with Aggression: Theology, Violence, and Vitality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 9. Greider suggests that vitality is the positive use of aggressive energy, while violence represents the negative use of aggression.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

of the devotions is owing in part to the ways in which they make possible the agency, creative power, and movement toward God-objects. There is a freedom to confide in the saints, to express intimate emotions—hope and fear and even anger. The saints, because they are understood as eternal in the heavens (except for Saint Pasquale), are not harmed by human emotions or expressions of aggression. They survive, they endure, and they smile. In the transitional space, such emotions may be processed, engaged, met, and/or transformed into creative energy and actions.

The devotions remain vital also because they are malleable. Artistic renderings of them express variety, invite improvisation. We have seen how the large-scale feasts represent both durability and change. But even daily rituals—such as bringing flowers to the saint—present small opportunities for the devout to shape and reshape her or his physical environment. By going to church, where sacred art surrounds her, or by going to the florist or the garden to find flowers for the saint, the devout alters and enriches her environment, filling it with fragrance or friendship. The devotions involve activity. This can be experienced as burdensome, as we have seen, when it absorbs the time and energy of women (and men) whose lives are already too full. But this activity can also be experienced as life-giving, especially to retirees who enjoy the opportunity to participate, shape, “have a hand in” the devotional activities. As such, the devotions can tap into and nourish, feed, the life force of the devout as they age, rather than allow it to wither.

The story of Maria (Chapter 2) illustrates the creativity and vitality to which the devotions give rise. Maria could be described as a religious virtuoso, not just because of

the time she invests in devotional practices but because of the energy she exudes. I noticed this in at least three arenas: in her praying and bible reading; in her domestic arts of baking and sewing; and in her comments about her faith. When Maria reads the Bible, she feels that God is communicating with her, and helping her to interpret it to her friends. She does this with gusto, with “feeling,” to use her word. She prays with feeling to the Madonna Rosa Mistica, to Jesus, and to assorted other saints. She has many friends of other ethnic origins, whose devotions she admires. Maria also exhibits vitality in her baking and sewing. She showed me some traditional Italian costumes that she had recently made for a devotional feast (Figure 43). The fabrics used were bright and crisp. Some of the white fabric was embellished with eyelet and embroidery, giving it the hint of a liturgical vestment. In many ways, Maria is a humble woman. In displaying these boldly beautiful articles she had created, she also seemed quite proud. Finally, Maria’s thoughtful comments about her life and faith suggested a subversive thread. She told me that she had been sitting near the Monsignor himself at recent church dinner. She watched as he was served his meal first. She said, “I told him I would like to be born a man, so I can go to priest [so I can become a priest]. Then I can get served first.” She makes this comment sweetly, with no hint of malice. But she makes her point nonetheless.

Sometimes I wonder whether the vitality of the devout in San Pedro isn’t owing, in part, to the presence of the Pacific Ocean. Many persons told me that they love the ocean, and that they go down by the marina to walk, to think, or meditate. Several

persons can actually see gorgeous views of the water from their homes. The beauty of the water, as well as a sense of the wonder and mystery of the sea, were mentioned by several people I interviewed. Additionally, views of the coastline remind some folks of their hometowns along the Southern coast of Italy, or of life on one of the islands. The ocean is, of course, a reminder of fishing adventures and accidents to many. But it is also experienced as a spiritual presence. This is not entirely unrelated to the sense of danger, power, and majesty that the water inspires. It is a potent life force with which to reckon.

Along with adding vitality to the lives of the devout as well as to the lives of many other people in San Pedro, the ocean seems to convey an expansive view of life. I would describe it as a generosity of spirit. It is evident in the large-scale celebrations that I have described as leaning toward excess. But it is more than excess, too. One woman I interviewed told the story of recently attending the second wedding of her daughter's ex-husband. This is a man who had caused her daughter considerable anguish over the course of many years of marriage. The couple had had a bitter divorce but had kept their interactions civil, in the interest of their children. "Donna," the woman I interviewed, wasn't sure she should attend this wedding. But her former son-in-law begged her to come, so she went, and enjoyed a place of honor there. Even more surprisingly, the man invited his ex-wife, who also chose to come and offered kind words to the new couple. When Donna told me this story, I gained a sense of an expansive spirit, one that could make room for new people and new arrangements, without having to blame or disown or distance herself from anyone. Later that evening, I waited while Donna took a break from

our interview so she that could put her husband to bed. Her husband suffered a debilitating stroke approximately two years ago, and Donna has been caring for him in their home ever since. Since his bed is now in the living room, I could not help but overhear when Donna sang him to sleep. “Have I told you lately that I love you?” she sang in a voice full of kindness and affection. I was moved by this gentleness. It struck me as another example of an expansive and vital spirit.

Conclusion

The three values that I have identified in this setting—connection, multiplicity, and celebration—add up to or disclose something more. I would call it a sacramental view of life. In recent writings, Andrew Greeley describes what he calls, variously, “the sacramental imagination,” or “the enchanted imagination” of Catholics.⁵⁹ In this work, Greeley argues for a special Catholic imagination, one that emphasizes the presence of God in mundane life. Greeley claims that Catholic writers tend to stress presence of God in the world, while Protestant writers more often speak of God’s absence. Or, to put it another way, Catholics emphasize the immanence of God, while Protestants emphasize divine transcendence.⁶⁰ While I do not agree with the entire argument of Greeley’s book, my research gives credence to the idea of a sacramental view of life that is specific to Catholic contexts.

⁵⁹ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Greeley is playing off of the language and concepts of David Tracy. See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

⁶⁰ Greeley, 5.

The work of Paul Connerton also speaks to a difference in Catholic experience. He roots this difference primarily in Catholic liturgy. Connerton, a theorist of social memory, notes that Catholic liturgy is “not propositional statement but sacred action.” Sacred actions “convey conviction by incorporating it. . . . Not the pulpit but the altar is the privileged site. In the pulpit the sacred narrative receives a commentary. At the altar the substance of the narrative is communicated in physical signs that contain it.”⁶¹ The “substance of the narrative,” the presence of Christ, is communicated to Catholics in a particularly visceral way through the sacrament of Holy Communion.

I hope through this study of Catholic devotions in San Pedro, the reader can gain a greater understanding and awareness of the visceral level at which Catholic religious practices can “convey conviction by incorporating it.” Catholics are accustomed to experiencing the presence of Christ in the actual wafer they receive weekly or even daily in the sacrament of Holy Communion. In this ritual, spiritual and material realms are regularly intermingled. Catholics’ embodied knowledge of this experience is explicitly underscored in the doctrine of transubstantiation. It is not difficult to understand how a sacramental view of other aspects of life can follow from this regular ritual experience, combined with the teaching of this venerable doctrine.

A sacramental worldview is exemplified in the comments of a couple I interviewed, both members of the third generation. They have both been divorced, and

⁶¹ Connerton, 70.

were married to each other within the last year.⁶² The couple told me of their profound sense of God's grace in their union, and in the blending of their new family. They are both active at Trinity Church, where the woman is active in the ministry of music, and the man helps serve Holy Communion, a task he approaches with great intensity and heart. In the course of our interview, after they had spoken at length of their love, their religious practices, and the intimacy of their shared faith and ethnic heritage, the man placed his hand down firmly on the dining room table. He said, "This is the altar. This is where everything happens. This is where we break bread."⁶³ At this, his wife embraced him, and began to weep gently. This couple exhibits an embodied faith. They experience the presence of Christ both in the sacrament at church, and in their communion with each other and their family at home. They bring a sense of sacred obligation or "incorporated conviction" to their relationship, and they celebrate this sacrament when they sit down together around their dining room table.

The situated values of connection, multiplicity, and celebration express the practical wisdom that arises from the practice of devotions in San Pedro. These values are not ontological statements about the divine, nor are they cultural characteristics of the immigrants. Rather, they are ways to name "the effects and traces of God" that arise out of religious practice. These are values of "hope and obligation" in this place. These values shift and allow for innovation as they are continuously reconstituted in practice.

⁶² They did not describe the circumstances of their divorces and/or annulments. However, it is clear that they enjoy participation in their church.

⁶³ Interview #28.

But they also exhibit signs of being durable, hard-won, reliable reminders of a sacramental way of life.

The children and grandchildren of the devout, to varying degrees, hold onto their religious practices, or let go, or reject them. Sometimes they experience themselves as held by religious bonds that they thought they'd broken. Or they find themselves remembering loved ones, saints, or sensations that they'd like to hold onto. In the vital and rich practice of devotions, worlds of meaning transpire. Effects and traces reverberate across the generations. Everywhere you turn you see God.



Figure 41 – Cabrillo Beach, San Pedro, CA. The landscape resembles those in immigrants' photos of their native Islands off the southern coast of Italy.



Figure 42 – Photo of promontory taken from the southern side of fishing pier at Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro.



Figure 43 – An Italian costume, hand-crafted by one of the devout, for the San Pietro Society's Blessing of the Fleet. Note the use of bright, crisp fabrics embellished with embroidery and eyelet.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion, Contribution, and Implications for Pastoral Theology and Care

It's history that matters, what keeps you together in the tight ball of nerves and flesh you are and makes you you and not someone else.

The protagonist in *Jewel*, by Brett Lott

Among the buildings-out of religion which the mind spontaneously indulges in, the aesthetic motive must never be forgotten.

William James

Conclusion and Contribution

This dissertation is an exercise in the “critical phenomenology of pastoral practice.” As such, it has offered me a chance to plumb some of the connections between history and “nerves and flesh” in the context of Italian Catholic devotions in San Pedro across three generations. Beyond merely describing these connections and these practices, I have tried to ask, following Elaine Graham, “What do these practices disclose/foreclose?”¹ By identifying some of the situated values to which the devotional practices give rise, I have attempted to highlight, interpret, and extend, on behalf of the devout, the practical wisdom available in their “lived religion.” In this endeavor, I have sought to “honor the strategic nature” of the practical reasoning that the devout employ.² Through this interpretive process, I have concluded that the practice of devotions in this setting expresses a sacramental view of life, through which the people perceive and

¹ Graham. *Transforming Practice*, 163.

² Ibid.

engage the presence of God in daily human experience. This embodied faith is experienced and expressed in devotional religious practices, in interpersonal relationships, and in communal rituals that enact shared memories of natal lands, immigration stories, fishing expeditions, fortunes, and losses. Visual piety, food habits and rituals, feeding ministries, and liturgical experiences all contribute to the people's evolving and diverse sacramental views of life.

An appreciation for a sacramental worldview specific to Catholic experience can be found in the work of William James. James, in addressing the differences between Protestant and Catholic religious experience, emphasized the importance of aesthetic sensibilities. He wrote, "Among the buildings-out of religion which the mind spontaneously indulges in, the aesthetic motive must never be forgotten."³ He elaborated on the differences between the aesthetic sensitivities of Roman Catholics and Protestants, describing the richness of the Catholic experience a "noble complexity." He wrote, "One feels then as if in the presence of some vast encrusted work of jewelry or architecture. . . . To an imagination used to the perspectives of dignity and glory, the naked gospel scheme seems to offer an almshouse for a palace."⁴ James noted how difficult these diverse aesthetic sensibilities made it for Catholics and Protestants to understand each other. In reference to "antiquated" Catholic beliefs and practices (probably meaning devotions)⁵

³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Martin Marty (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1982), 459.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 460.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 461, note # 1.

that “Catholic intellectuals smile on fondly while no longer believing in literally,” James wrote,

To the Protestant, on the contrary, they are childish in the sense of being idiotic falsehoods. He must stamp out their delicate and lovable redundancy, leaving the Catholic to shudder at his literalness. He appears to the latter as morose as if he were some hard-eyed, numb, monotonous kind of reptile. The two will never understand each other—their centres of emotional energy are too different. Rigorous truth and human nature’s intricacies are always in need of a mutual interpreter.⁶

I hope this dissertation will contribute to the ongoing work of mutual interpretation of which James spoke. This dissertation seeks to interpret, largely for Protestant pastoral theologians but also for others, the intricacies of human nature that find expression in Italian Catholic devotional practices in San Pedro. Those whose first inclination is to judge the devotions as childish or “idiotic falsehoods” are encouraged to take a closer look. The “emotional center” of these practices cannot be completely comprehended through the “literalness” of Protestants—that is to say, comprehended theologically. This is not to suggest that Catholics are not able theologians, nor to give the impression that the persons I interviewed in this study were anything less than competent in their theological reflections. That would feed a negative stereotype about Catholics in general and Catholic popular religion in particular.⁷ Rather, I want to lift up what I suspect is a common bit of practical wisdom among the Italian Catholics that I interviewed in San Pedro. This is that their religious faith is more actual and embodied, more sensual and earthy, more magical and miraculous than formalized theology—mere words about

⁶ Ibid., 461.

God—could ever be. Perhaps one of my interviewees, Matthew, himself a theologically well-read and unusually reflective individual, said it better than I can. When asked what being Catholic means to him, he said with great conviction, “Theology is not the answer! Theology is a launching point for spiritual growth!”⁸ Spiritual growth for Matthew and many others in this context involves visual piety and prayer practices that link the devout through memory to persons and places and experiences in the past, and practices of ministry that share food and resources needed for others’ survival into the future.

In this community, a felt sense of the values of connection, multiplicity, and the celebration of life are communicated both through theological reflection and through rituals and liturgy that enact divine mysteries amidst fanfare and drama. The Catholic *habitus* in San Pedro is continuously constructed through the “buildings-out of religion” that depict, influence, and shape perceptions of the divine, and constructions of self and other. This happens especially through visual contact with aesthetically appealing physical representations of supernatural figures that inhabit both churches and homes.

In homes, the sacred and the mundane inhabit devotional altars, bumping up against each other in apparent confusion. One woman’s bedroom slippers, folded neatly on her bedside table, rest against a picture of her deceased mother, a picture that is itself draped with rosary beads (Figure 19). There is a kind of jarring admixture of the spiritual and the material in home altars, one that is replicated in many aspects of the devotional practices. It is understandable to me that Protestants might gasp at the ease with which

⁷ Orlando O. Espin. *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997).

statues can sometimes get confused with the saints they represent, or at the way in which Mary or the one of the saints can seem to become more central than the cross. I can appreciate the concern that a sense of divine transcendence might be lost in all the clutter.

Yet I hope that this dissertation also demonstrates some of the merits of a sacramental view and a sacramental way of life. I hope that it contributes to an appreciation for the pastoral value of devotional practices that break down the barriers between the sacred and the mundane. When the sacred can be treated in such mundane and familiar ways, can human life itself become more sacred, more vital? My “unprovable conclusion”⁹ is that the transcendent power of God is not lost in this setting, it is accessed. It is accessed through embodied experiences of art and land and sea, and through bonds of affection and attachment to female as well as male representations of the holy. In this sacramental way of life, the devout celebrate the miracle of daily sustenance and survival, with fanfare and festivity, friends and family, and courageous attempts to live passionately in the face of fear, challenge, loss, and change. “*Viva san Giuseppe, viva!*” This, too, is a fitting way of honoring God.

Future Directions for Research

In this scholarly endeavor, as is often the case, there are some “roads not taken,” some directions that future research could take and some dimensions of the present research that have not been fully explored. One direction for future study in San Pedro would be to conduct an in-depth study of the multi-cultural make-up of the congregation

⁸ Interview #30.

⁹ McDannell, “Interpreting Things,” 377.

at Mary Star of the Sea. Because I suspect that the long history of intercultural contact that is present in this parish is somewhat unique, this would be a logical focus for future work. Ideally, a team of researchers with the necessary language skills and cultural competencies could conduct such a congregational study. The practices of Latino, Croatian, and Filipino groups could be explored and compared, and patterns of interaction between and among these groups and individuals could also be studied. Several implications for ministry to recent immigrants and ministry in multi-cultural contexts could be drawn from such a study. A corollary to this research might be a focus on the construction of ethnic and racial identity. I touched on these issues lightly in the present work, but more study could contribute a richer understanding of these dynamics.

Because this dissertation is a multi-disciplinary endeavor, difficult choices had to be made in regard to the bodies of literature that I explored. One area at which my analysis hints at but does not fully explore is the field of ritual studies. Some of the authors whose work I would like to read more closely along these lines include Ronald Grimes,¹⁰ Theodore Jennings,¹¹ Erving Goffman,¹² and Catherine Bell.¹³ In pastoral and therapeutic fields, Michael B. Aune and Valerie DeMarinis,¹⁴ among others, address the

¹⁰ Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990).

¹¹ Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., "On Ritual Knowledge," *Journal of Religion* 62, no. 2 (1982): 111-27.

¹² Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967).

¹³ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Michael B. Aune and Valerie DeMarinis, eds., *Religious and Social Ritual: Interdisciplinary Explorations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

role of ritual in various forms of healing. This literature might enhance my understandings of the topics I explored.

Implications for the Discipline of Pastoral Theology and Care

The “critical phenomenology of pastoral practice” that I have employed here can be viewed as a method available to enliven future research in pastoral theology. As such, it can be used to enhance the broad trend in the field of pastoral theology toward a greater recognition of the significance of the historically embedded or situated nature of all contexts of ministry. By moving the focus of our attention to the actual practice of religion in a given setting, pastoral theologians can perceive the situated values and “traces of God” in that setting. If the field of pastoral theology moves ahead in this direction, the result will be more respectful, complex, and sensitive interpretations of Christian faith and values.

Additionally, I want to suggest that critical studies of ministry contexts can also function as a form of pastoral care in those contexts. When we invite the persons to tell their stories, we engage them in a narrative process that is itself curative. New literature in the fields of “narrative therapy” and ministry with the aging attests to the emotional benefits of constructing the life-story even as one tells it.¹⁵ In the course of my research in San Pedro, I often felt that the process of data gathering itself was a moving and mutually enriching one for both the devout and for me. Many of the persons I interviewed in San Pedro expressed their gratitude to me for taking the time to listen to

¹⁵ James E. Birren, Gary M. Kenyon, Jan-Erik Ruth, Johannes Schroots, and Torbjorn Svensson, eds., *Aging and Biography: Explorations in Adult Development* (New York: Springer Publishing, 1996).

their stories. Elderly persons, especially, seemed to want their stories heard, remembered, respected. When we ask persons to share their stories and their theological constructions, we communicate through practice an “incorporated conviction” of their dignity and worth. If we find a way to report or reflect back our findings, such as through a written publication or an historical exhibition, we extend the benefits of the narrative processes engaged.¹⁶

In order to explain what I consider to be the further implications of my study to the practice of pastoral care, I offer the following story. I recently had occasion to present some of my research from San Pedro to my colleagues at Wesley Theological Seminary. After my lecture, someone asked about the “transferability” of my findings. If I understood the question correctly, it was aimed at ascertaining what insights from my research in San Pedro could be “transferred” to the task of preparing mostly Protestant seminary students for engagement in various professional ministries.

I want to offer two different responses to this thoughtful question. My first response is to emphasize that my research findings are not directly transferable, because they are local and situated. Again, I refer to the words of Elaine Graham:

Therefore, it is essential to emphasize the phenomenal nature of studying the situated practices of any community. It characterizes practical wisdom as heuristic, not criterial; so theory and epistemology assume no deterministic or absolute status beyond their own context.¹⁷

¹⁶ Tamara Hareven, “The Search for Generational Memory,” in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, eds. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1978).

¹⁷ Graham, 162.

The transferable insight from this theory is that seminary students, pastors, and religious professionals might benefit from engaging in the work of critical phenomenology of pastoral practice in their own settings. The considerable new literature in the field of congregational studies has begun to argue this point, and to provide some “user-friendly” methodological tools designed for non-professional researchers to use in the study of local congregations and other contexts of ministry.¹⁸

If, for example, a pastor made it a practice to institute a congregational self-study at the start of his or her ministry in a new church, many benefits could accrue. First, the pastor would have an opportunity to learn, firsthand, something about the religious *habitus* that he or she has been called to serve. The enshrined values of the community would become apparent to the pastor sooner, thereby clearing the way for his or her more sensitive engagement with the congregation. Through the research process, the pastor would gain insight and access to the community. The people would gain a chance to tell their stories, to be heard. If members of the congregation were involved in the interviewing process, they too would gain insight as well as practice in the art of listening. If such studies helped facilitate caring conversations within the faith community, this would be of significant benefit.

Additionally, my study suggests implications for the practice of pastoral counseling. The practice of “taking” personal or family life histories at the start of a therapeutic relationship is fairly widespread among counseling professionals. But many

¹⁸ Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley, and McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregations*.

of the cultural and religious dimensions of these histories may be overlooked. Certainly clients are not routinely asked questions regarding their family's immigration history or religious practices. More thorough history taking, with a focus on religious or cultural practices, could significantly enhance the pastoral counseling relationship.

The considerable research on inter-cultural pastoral care and counseling could also benefit from a focus on practice. This would be preferable to more cataloging of pastoral counselors' or other clinicians' perceptions of various groups' "cultural characteristics."¹⁹ I think that a focus on persons' practices in their socio-cultural contexts can help religious professionals break out of habits of stereotyping persons and groups and their values. I suspect that this kind of attention to practice would help us advance toward the goal of interpathic communication and connection across ethnic and racial lines.

I noted above that I had two different responses to the "transferability" question. My first response is to suggest that insights from one setting cannot be casually transferred to another. My second response is to suggest that the values enshrined in San Pedro may offer some "food for thought" for ministry in other settings, if we hold these values lightly, and think analogically.

For example, the value of connection enshrined in the devotional practices led me to explore a tension concerning the possibility that a sense of close spiritual and interpersonal connection may be experienced by the devout as stifling more than healing.

¹⁹ See, for example, Monica McGoldrick, John K. Pearce, and Joseph Giordano, eds., *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 1982).

How does the practice of close connections in this setting drain the life energy or renew it? How does prayer foster dependence and/or resistance? The answers to these questions are particular and embedded, not transferable. But the questions themselves and the issues they raise have parallels across settings. Pastors, college chaplains, and counselors all struggle with the tension between wanting to offer comfort and support, and alternatively wanting to “push” (to use an aggressive metaphor) their people toward change and transformation. The exploration of these dynamics in one context could be used as a basis of comparison or thoughtful reflection on pastoral strategies in another.

Similarly, the value of multiplicity as a feature of the divine might find a parallel in Protestant discussions of the diversity of theologies included in the biblical canon. Also, the multi-ethnic nature of the context of ministry in San Pedro is not unique. Some insights drawn from this case may be helpful as clergy and congregations think about the practical strategies they want to use for ministry with new immigrants or in other diverse contexts. In particular, congregations might want to consider the value of making space—both symbolic and actual—for new immigrants or ethnic groups, in which their customs, practices, memories, and styles find expression, as they engage in the difficult cultural work of relocating themselves in a new land. Authors in the field of congregational studies point out that those who undertake congregational self-studies are often surprised to discover a high level of diversity in the cultural backgrounds, attitudes, and ideas of members of their churches. Discovering the diversity and/or conflict of opinion within a congregation can in itself be a stretching or growth-inducing exercise.

Increased knowledge of human diversity in our own midst, among folks we know and love, has the potential to transform understandings of ourselves and others.

Finally, the value of celebration and/or vitality can be explored in various contexts of ministry. In this study, I found that religious vitality was often rooted in the aesthetic and embodied dimensions of the practice of the devotions. In Protestant settings, embodied and aesthetic religious experience will often be located in the field of music.²⁰ Both in singing hymns and in listening to them, the body, the senses, and the aesthetic sensibilities of the faithful are called forth. The intensity of arguments over new hymnbooks in mainline Protestant churches indicates that this is a vein of vitality. This is a practice and an experience of religion that moves people to the transitional realm. Religious professionals can benefit from paying attention to the “buildings-out of religion” and understanding them as centers of emotional energy and vitality, strains of the glory of God.

My work might also suggest the general importance of attending to visual surroundings in sacred spaces. This might help pastors comprehend the meaning of the intensity that some church members bring to issues of maintenance and preservation of church buildings. If sacred spaces are used by the faithful to gain access to the transitional realm, we can appreciate what is at stake in decisions that might alter these environments.

²⁰ Rebecca J. Slough. “‘Let Every Tongue, by Art Refined, Mingle Its Softest Notes with Mine’: An Exploration of Hymn-Singing Events and Dimensions of Knowing,” in *Religious and Social Ritual: Interdisciplinary Explorations*, eds. Michael B. Aune and Valerie DeMarinis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 175-206.

Appendix

1. Questions used for semi-structured interviews with immigrants and some members of the second-generation. These forms were not distributed as questionnaires. They were used by the researcher in order to initiate open-ended conversations.

1. Name: _____

Mention: your name is important to help me trace family connections. It will not, however, be used in any articles or books that may result from this research.

2. Age: _____ Male _____ Female _____

3. Describe your education and occupation.

4. Where do you live now? _____ Where were you born? _____

5. Briefly describe the people in your family tree, including parents and grandparents, spouse, children and grandchildren. Include names, ages, places of birth, occupations, and any outstanding features.

6. Describe your own experience of immigration, or recall stories of immigration told to you by parents or grandparents. Include dates.

7. What did your neighborhood in the homeland look like? How does it compare or contrast to San Pedro?

8. Describe your church and devotions in the homeland.

9. Describe your current practice of religion:

10. Are there any particular saints to whom you pray? Which are most important to you and why?

San Giovan Giuseppe della Croce

St. Joseph

St. Ann

Our Lady of Guadeloupe

Our Lady of the Assumption

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Padre Pio

St. Jude

St. Anthony

Other

11. Describe the appearance, character traits, and history of the saint or saints to whom you most frequently pray.

**12. Do you have home altars? In what rooms?
Describe these altars, how you created them, and where the statues came from.**

13. Describe your devotional practices at home and in church:

How frequently do you pray?

What or whom do you pray for?

Do you bring flowers to the saint?

Light candles?

Fast?

Offer money?

Use rosary beads?

Holy cards?

Hymns?

In what language do you pray?

In what position is your body?

What are you looking at?

14. How do you feel when you pray?

How have your prayers been answered?

15. If you are an immigrant, when you came to this country, did your devotion increase?

decrease?

remain the same?

16. Did any of the saints help you adjust to life in this country? If so, how?

17. In what ways do your devotions remind you of your homeland?

18. In what ways do your devotions remind you of your family?

19. How old were you when you first learned these devotions?

20. How do you feel about the saint(s) to whom you pray? Describe the relationship in as much detail as possible.

21. What does the saint do for/to you?

22. What does the saint require of you?

23. Do you share your devotional experiences or practices with anyone?

friends

priests

family members?

24. Do you belong to any religious societies? Please specify which ones and describe your participation..

St. Ann's Society

ICF

St. Joseph's Table

Velike Gospe Society

Hermanidad Catolica Hispanoamericana Club

Croatian Catholic Family Guild

Other

25. How do you feel about the devotional practices and feast days of other ethnic saints at Mary Star? Do you or your children or grandchildren participate in any of them?

26. Do you think of yourself as being Italian? How do your parents, children, and/or grandchildren describe their ethnicity?

27. Have you tried to pass on your devotions to your children? Do your children or grandchildren practice these devotions? If so, are they as fervent as you are?

28. Does the Mary Star church building, or any particular statue, image, or relic, hold special meaning for you?

29. Do you participate in any special feast day celebrations, masses, novenas, or processions? Please describe them in detail, including special foods, customs, clothing, hymns, etc. Also, specify your role and your reasons for participating.

30. Did you or your parents or grandparents participate in the fisherman's fiesta? Please describe your experiences of it in detail.

31. Do you have any photographs, diaries, or written accounts of your family's devotional practices that you would be willing to show me?

32. Do you read any Catholic magazines or devotional literature?

33. Is there anything else about you, your family, or your devotional life that you want me to know?

**2. Research questions used with members of the later immigrant generations.
These topics were also used to prompt open-ended conversation.**

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Education:

Employment:

Family tree:

Family immigration history:

What is your ethnic background?

What does your ethnic identity mean to you?

Have you visited your family's country or countries of origin?

What was that like for you?

Do you speak your parents' or grandparents native language? Do your children?

Do you consider yourself Catholic?

What does being Catholic mean to you?

Did you grow up in a home with indoor or outdoor shrines to the saints, holy water containers, religious art, etc.?

If you can recall, what were your childhood impressions of such art or objects in your home? Do you recall any emotions associated with these representations?

What about your recollections of religious statues or art in the church?

Any special figure that you did or do focus on while praying or attending Mass?

Did you go to Catholic school?

Describe your current religious practices, noting frequency.

Mass

Candles

prayers

confession

Rosary

Flowers

novenas

feasts

Do you pray to any saints?

G.G.

Joseph

Anthony

Jude

BVM

Padre Pio

Sacred Heart

Do you have home altars, crucifixes or shrines?

Where?

For whom or what did/do you pray?

Have your prayers ever been answered?

What do the saints require of you?

What do the Saints mean to you?

Do they remind you of your family?

Are they linked to your family's immigration story?

Did your family take part in the fishing industry in Italy or San Pedro?

The fisherman's fiesta?

What was that like for you?

How did you feel about the sea when you were little?

Were there many stories of fishermen lost at sea?

Did you feel growing up that Mary Star was a "fishermen's church?"

How did/do you feel about your parents' religion? Was it helpful, burdensome, pleasurable, boring, etc.?

Did/does their religion help or hinder them in coping with difficult life circumstances? What specifically?

How do you deal with adversity in your life?

Are there attitudes, customs, or social connections that you have kept with you related to your family's immigration history or religious practices?

Do you try to pass these on to your children (if you have any)?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the meaning of your faith or spirituality in your life?

Mary Clark Moschella
5795 Brockton Avenue
Riverside, CA 92506
(909) 369-6894

Information Regarding Personal Interviews:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am conducting these interviews as part of the research for my Ph.D. dissertation at the Claremont School of Theology. My study aims to understand the meaning and function of Italian Catholic devotional practices in San Pedro. Your interview will be tape-recorded and possibly transcribed later. If I quote from your interview in my dissertation or any articles or books related to it, I will not identify you by name.

If you have any questions, please contact me at the address above. Or, if you have any concerns, you may contact those who oversee my research at the Claremont School of Theology. My advisor and dissertation director is Professor Kathleen Greider, at the Claremont School of Theology, (909) 626-3521 ext. 245.

I have read the above information and give my permission for this interview to be taped.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

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